I

AN EVENING WITH LÉOPOLD III

September 1939 at the Château of Laeken. — Portrait of Léopold III. — Policy of neutrality of the King of the Belgians. — Count Xavier de Grünne, champion of intervention. — My radically anti-interventionist position. — Complete agreement with the King. — Project for a formula of full powers. — Royal approval, then indecision. — Anarchy begins again. — Sessions of Parliament. — The press unleashed.

The grenade that lit the Second World War rolled along the ground during the last night of August 1939.

It could have been defused before that fatal instant. The arm could have been held back before the terrible throw. Even at the final second, the explosive could still have been diverted toward dead fields. No. War had returned because it had to return, because too many gavials wanted it, because men are mad, need blood, need hatred, and find in great international slaughters those fabulous outlets where virtues are exalted, where vices gorge themselves, where life—Good or Evil—can burst forth toward the exceptional.

From the first European eddies, I was the determined enemy of this war.

A war easily avoidable: a quarrel like that of Danzig and the Polish Corridor would not have been any more complicated to settle than the Sudeten incident. It was a question of justice and common sense.

A senseless war! Bled in every generation since Bonaparte (“My glory,” he said, “is worth more than the life of a million imbeciles”), Europe was running to suicide by running to war once again. To me this was obvious, obvious enough to burn the eyes. Since 1936 I had repeated it week after week.

To refuse coldly and systematically to the overpopulated Reich its living space, one or another of its former colonies, normal and decent communications between its two eastern Prussian provinces; to oppose, despite the massive will of the voters, the return to the mother country of cities as indisputably German as Danzig; on the contrary, to make every stage in the regrouping of the Germans the occasion for a universal bacchanal, to manufacture from whole cloth a Polish affair by corrupting and buying its colonels and its ministers, to heat that country white-hot, to push it into swaggering provocations when this same Poland and its political chiefs, only a few months earlier, had collaborated enthusiastically with Hitler in liquidating the Czech state, loudly demanding at Teschen, weapon in hand, their share of the spoils—this was not only to drive the strongest and healthiest people of the continent toward a fatal outburst; it was to push all Europe into civil war, a war in which the English and French, even if victorious, could gain nothing and could only lose.

And so it was.

After having called the universe to the quarry, Hitler’s work was destroyed from top to bottom. Granted. And afterward? What remains of the tricolor-waving France of 1939, of its world prestige, of its sound currency, of its so prosperous colonies? What remains of the proud British Empire, of its material domination, of its mastery of the seas, of the impressive strength of the pound sterling, which until then dictated its law to the markets of the universe?

Only fanaticism could have made men blind enough not to glimpse this general tumble.

But if the fall of the great European countries was already written in the future, with all the more reason the small countries, placed at the historic points of collision, risked being crushed in this fantastic derailment.

More particularly, we, the men of the old Low Countries of the North Sea, were going to find ourselves at one of the principal crossroads of fire and blood.

For me, leader of Rex, and for thousands of Belgians who had kept their cool on the eve of this mad tragedy, one concern had dominated all others: to attempt the impossible in order to spare our people the horrors of this conflict, and to keep Belgium, until the very last second, apart from the struggle of the mighty.

Scarcely had the war cast its first savage cry over the eastern plains when I published, in the Rexist press, an article cursing the new carnage. Then I asked King Léopold III to receive me.

As leader of the strongest opposition party in Belgium, I did not consider that I had the right, in such a black squall, to entrust myself to my own inspiration alone. A country, especially a country in danger, is, and must first constitute, physically and morally, a unity. I wished to act only insofar as I was certain of being in complete communion of mind and action with the man who symbolized, in my eyes, the constant interest of the nation.

A few months later, the accidents of the European storm were to make Léopold III one of the most fiercely vilified men of the century. But in September 1939, he was still a prince of legend, undisputed in his country and abroad.

The King invited me to meet him discreetly that evening at the Palace of Laeken.

Night was about to fall. The great park was blackening, a giant mass enclosing the clear avenue and the heavy gray-and-white pastry of the château. An officer, Captain Jacques de Dixmude, was waiting for me. He guided me toward a drawing room. The King, in general's uniform, booted, with beige breeches, entered immediately, his complexion fresh, his hair airy, his eyes carrying those strange gleams of kindness and sadness that always disconcerted.

Léopold was then remarkably handsome, powerfully built, but distinguished, all suppleness. Nevertheless, his radiant strength was accompanied—had always been accompanied—by secret emanations of regret, timidity, boredom, melancholy. One felt him to be at once strong and weak, bursting with vigor and hesitant. His eye had quivers, and at the same time gleams that melted and went out. At each of my meetings with Léopold III, I had the physical sensation that this man, dazzling with youth, was undermined by a complex of neurasthenia that weakened him deeply. This sadness showed through fleetingly, vanished, returned, and gave a dreamy charm to what was effeminate in his athlete's body: the almost transparent skin, the features of the face almost too fine, the hair waving with silken softness... His gaze, when one went all the way down into it, was a gaze in which appeals floated...

We had sat down side by side, with no table to separate us, no witness to disturb us. The shutters had closed again on the twilight. A golden light animated the silks in delicate ashen silver.

The King was an extremely simple man. At my first audience, in 1936, after a few minutes, I had said

to him quite plainly: “Sire, protocol requires that I answer your questions, nothing more. With that system, we risk missing important problems. May I speak clearly here also?” From that day onward, our conversations had been direct. The King had a lively, mischievous mind, sometimes ironic. His intelligence was clear, deep, without pedantry. He had studied much, studied well; his knowledge was exact, complete, and did not become confused. He spoke slowly, like his father, Albert I. But one could guess, from certain words thrown out in a metallic tone, that he was irritable and stubborn. He had sick nerves, liable to collapse, and a will capable of tensing him too tightly, to the point of making him obstinate before an adversary and before an obstacle.

I was curious to see how international events had reacted upon this authoritarian neurotic. He was calm. He had ridden on horseback until nightfall. His body relaxed, his legs crossed, he explained his point of view to me, or he listened to me.

Léopold III’s foreign policy and the foreign policy of Rex had always coincided exactly.

At the time of our lightning advance in 1936, the King, with great courage, had wisely freed Belgium from every military tie with neighbors who might have dragged us, against our interests, into their selfish conflicts.1 He had always taken care that the Belgian state’s contacts with foreign countries should be correct, oriented toward understanding and collaboration. A real détente had occurred. Our relations with England were perfect. Our relations with France had remained relatively good, although the King was not precisely a Gallophile. Our relations with the Reich had ceased to be bad, at least officially. Already in 1935, King Léopold had strongly encouraged Prime Minister van Zeeland to invite to Brussels M. de Ribbentrop, then a simple personal delegate of Hitler.

Faced with the conflict that now threw Germans, French, and English against one another, what attitude was Belgium going to take? Throw itself, head lowered, into the brawl too? Be neutral only with the lips? Be truly, sincerely, objectively neutral?

I described to the King the violent eddies that were agitating the nation.

For several years, all Europe had been spiritually marked by the military conflict now being born. In every country, parties, clans, and families were confronting one another. Passions had become exasperated in Belgium as elsewhere.

Within the Rexist Movement itself, different tendencies were confronting one another. We were all agreed on resisting the invader desperately, from wherever he came. “But no provocations, no premature taking of positions!” cried some. “Is it not preferable,” replied others, “to anticipate the invasion, to choose one’s partners in time, so as to intervene with the maximum chances, having prepared for the shock deliberately and carefully?”

For certain of our leaders, such as Count Xavier de Grünne, war with Germany was certain. The inseparable friend of King Albert, companion of his mountain excursions, Xavier de Grünne was animated by a burning need to devote himself and by a generosity both sublime and childish. He had climbed the Mountains of the Moon in the Congo, then had come back down from the Moon toward Belgium just at the moment when I was striking great broom-blows into the mess of bankers’ hirelings, swindlers, pickpockets, and bribe-takers of the old parties of political finance. He had become a senator of Rex, an impetuous, whimsical senator, always ready to climb the chandeliers, turning around from his seat to administer resounding slaps to the jowls of his stupefied adversaries. But he was straight as a sword, pure as the lights of morning.

At the beginning of 1939, he came to see me in order to propose a new plan of foreign policy. “Attacked by Hitler, we will be sooner or later,” he explained to me. “It is useless to deceive oneself. Rather than wait to be thrown into the Anglo-French camp amid the jostling of a first day of invasion, it is better to pass immediately into the coalition where we will in any case be driven back one day, willingly or unwillingly, German panzers at our backs.”

Consequently, Xavier de Grünne asked me to launch the Rexist Movement fully into a great campaign of pro-Allied intervention.

An initiative of this kind was not displeasing to me in principle. If it was in the interest of our country to renounce neutrality, then neutrality had to be renounced outright.

We were free from any attachment with regard to Germany. Xavier de Grünne, who knew every last political or financial secret of Rex, knew better than anyone that our independence from the Reich was absolute. For him, for us, only the salvation of the country counted.

But where was salvation? I could not bring myself to accept Xavier de Grünne’s arguments. First, at the beginning of 1939, European war was not certain. (Today there is no doubt that without the pressures of every kind exerted at that time on Poland by the United Kingdom, a German-Polish settlement would have been worked out which, however imperfect, would still have been better than the reduction of Warsaw to a heap of ruins and the delivery of the Polish state in 1945 to the tyranny of the Soviets.)

Second, even if this avoidable war were not avoided, it was not certain that it would be prolonged. An arrangement might come about. And in fact, the restoration of peace was still possible on several occasions during the fatal winter that followed the Polish campaign. We therefore had every interest in not compromising our country too soon.

Finally, the Allies were not ready. The English possessed only a few divisions in condition to fight. As usual, they counted on the docility of the continentals to receive the first blows. The French had the necessary men, that is true. But the morale of their troops was detestable. Moreover, these troops knew nothing of modern war. And aviation failed them.

To launch ourselves voluntarily and prematurely into this brawl was to call the German rush into our country at a moment when no one in Europe was in a position to resist it.

Certainly, since then, the war was apparently won by the Allies—after what delays and at what price! In fact, it was lost by all Europeans, French and English included. For the latter especially, it was a detestable affair. If they had foreseen the true end, they would have been more prudent and, no doubt, better inspired at the beginning.

Others came to the rescue later: Roosevelt’s Americans with dollars, Stalin’s Asians with the sickle. They prevailed. But Europe was struck to death. Victory of America, yes! Victory of communism and the Mongols, yes! But victory of the Allies of 1939, no! The belligerents of that time, defeated and victorious, were well and truly knocked out, all of them without distinction.

In 1939, one could not yet count on the intervention of the Americans, who remained, in great majority, isolationists.

The Soviets, for their part, were determined to remain on the lookout as long as possible. When the Europeans had thoroughly torn one another apart and weakened one another, when they had committed themselves irreversibly to the irreparable, then and only then would the Soviets enter the lists for the final club-blow.

Every evening, I repeated to my leaders and had my newspapers drum out the same refrain: “If there is a war in Europe, it is Stalin, in the end, who will win it.”

For these various reasons, I was the resolute enemy of the war, above all of a war whose outbreak we would help, or into which we would engage ourselves without being absolutely obliged to do so.

First, everything had to be done to avoid war in Europe. Second, if it broke out, everything had to be done to smother it. Third, if it continued, we had to devote ourselves fiercely to remaining outside the conflict, in the hope, however slight, that an arrangement would still come before the steamroller passed over the bodies of us all.

These were the arguments that I repeated to King Léopold at the beginning of September 1939.

These were the arguments that, a few months earlier, I had set out to Xavier de Grünne. The theses of each of us were honest and equally defensible. But in conscience, I was certain that mine were the most in keeping with the interest of Europe and of my country. I had my dearest friends and Xavier’s dearest friends called in. All agreed with me. Xavier de Grünne, who was a very precise man, had already come with the bundle of articles that were to open, in our daily newspaper Le Pays réel, the pro-Allied campaign. He took back his file with an affectionate and street-urchin smile. He concluded: “Perhaps it is you who are right, but if you are wrong, I will come back here one day and shoot you all down, one by one, with a revolver.” He was not joking.

We declared ourselves agreed on the formula, and we parted fraternally.

The most comical thing was what followed. Despite our efforts to save peace, Belgium was nevertheless invaded and submerged. I logically expected, after the campaign of 1940, to see dear Xavier appear, brandishing his pistol. But when, after my stay in nineteen “democratic” prisons, I returned to Brussels, the first article that I found at the head of the principal newspaper of the collaborationist press was an article by Xavier de Grünne!

Not that he had changed. His principles were of rock. But he had seen the result of this war that he had, in complete good faith, wished to hasten. Faithful to his country, he was trying to raise up the ruins.

He immediately went further than anyone in visions of the future. He understood all the advantage the Soviets would draw from the tragedy in which Europe was sinking. Fearing the extent of the communist push after the war, not shrinking before danger, he devised a personal plan for the defense of Belgium as secret as it was radical. He had become almost invisible. We did not know what he was doing apart from his articles. Audacious as always, he was mysteriously running the roads, working to assemble the combat materiel of a militia of his own invention which, on the day of general decomposition, would face, in Brussels, the triumphant bands of Moscow.

The Germans stumbled onto the secret and discovered a prodigious arsenal. Xavier, who went to the bottom of everything, had turned over all Flanders to unearth the weapons depots buried by various divisions of the Belgian army on the eve of the capitulation of May 28, 1940. He had brought back,

polished, and hidden, in the cellars of his château and elsewhere, enough to arm several tens of thousands of men! Dear, very dear Xavier, noble and pure paladin of the Struggle! The laws of war were against him. The Germans condemned him to death, but they did not execute him. He was no longer heard of. Only after the war was it learned that he had succumbed, from privations, but proud and indomitable, in the concentration camp of Buchenwald.

My conversation with the King, at Laeken, had gone on very late.

As I had set forth to Léopold III my worries, my inner debates, and my resolutions, and as I had come to know exactly the Sovereign's conceptions, I had had the joy of seeing that the Monarch's theses agreed exactly with mine. To separate myself politically from a marvelous friend like Xavier de Grünne had cost me. But to know that the King, too, found the European war madness, desired, at the first clearing in the sky, to work to reconcile the opponents, and wished in any case, until the very last extremity, to keep Belgium outside this mutual throat-cutting—that gave me the courage to continue the struggle.

If even among us, within Rex, a disciplined party, the eddies had been impressive, what was it outside, among the drifting crowds stirred up by the campaigns of the newspapers?

Across Europe, the news agencies and the great press were in large part in the hands of freebooters who stupefied the masses, heated their bile, dragged the Reich on the hurdle, and conducted against it unprecedented, mendacious, and hateful campaigns.

The Belgian press, always glued to that of Paris, had not escaped these pressures. King Léopold knew its surges perfectly. On the eve of the war it was nothing but a growling boil of anti-German imprecations.

I pointed out to the King that such an attitude would be incompatible with an official policy of neutrality. It was necessary to decide one way or the other, and if one considered that Germany was a country of monsters and that there was nothing to be done with it, to leave neutrality outright and take sides openly; but if one played the card of neutrality, it had to be played honestly, publicly, with serenity and objectivity.

The King could not help wishing that public opinion be de-poisoned instead of being injected each day, in massive doses, with the worst excitants, from the parliamentary tribune and in the newspapers.

But how to put a brake on these campaigns of agitators, sword-rattlers, and yelpers in a country where license is the very foundation of public liberties? I had arrived at the second point of my report to the King.

As far as neutrality was concerned, I now knew that I was on the right road, exactly in line with the royal thought. It was still necessary that this neutrality should not be merely an artificial attitude, daily contradicted by the yapping of thousands of operators and fanatics.

I proposed to the King that he make maximum use of the rights conferred on him by the Constitution. The Belgian constitution orders that the Chambers meet for at least forty days a year. The forty days of the parliamentary year 1939 had been reached and passed.

The Belgian constitution further requires that the budgets be voted by the Chambers.

I begged the King to come himself before Parliament, to appeal to the civic spirit of the parliamentarians, to ask them to grant their confidence to the Government for ten months, and to vote all the budgets on the spot, patriotically, without debate.

The three great traditional parties were in power. They monopolized authority. They could therefore have complete reassurance about governmental management. We Rexistes were ready, without asking for anything, thinking only of the salvation of the fatherland, to vote immediately for these enlarged powers that would enable a strong government, even if electorally our adversary, to make its policy respected in the country.

The measures that I proposed to the King were strictly constitutional. They infringed no privilege of the nation or of the parties. If the King, at so grave a moment in history, presented himself before Parliament, strong in his prestige, the result would be achieved in half an hour. By contrast, if the two Assemblies again launched themselves into tumultuous and daily debates, ill-timed words would burst forth; the electricity would communicate itself to the country, and the efforts of the King and his ministers to conduct an honest policy of neutrality would be publicly torpedoed by irresponsible daubers.

What is possible in the Commons, which possess old traditions of wisdom and where formal and phlegmatic Britons assemble, is not possible in our countries of quick-blooded duelists with richly colored speech. The Belgian Chambers, at the Monarch's appeal, had to admit for themselves the necessity of avoiding any deviation and allow the Government to maneuver usefully and silently. The latter had to be certain of being able to conduct in peace, during these perilous months, its difficult and complex policy without constantly catching its foot in nets, without each minister also having to lose four or five hours every day in fooling about, gawking, and attending, powerless, interminable debates on the manufacture of wooden shoes at Saint-Nicolas-Waes or on the hazards of the Ostend sailors' fishing in the Saint George's Channel...

Finally, strengthened by the confidence of the quasi-unanimity of Parliament, the Government had to be able to impose temporarily a mute on the excesses of language of certain provocateurs.

I said to the King: "Sire, today the whole country, sensing the external danger, is trembling. It is conscious of the peril. It is awaiting your instructions and will acclaim, be certain of it, your initiative. The repercussions will be considerable, both inside the country and abroad. The Government will be able to work. Neutrality will not be put in danger at every instant by individual excesses. Neutrality is a tightrope exercise. It scarcely permits extravagances, especially to countries as small and as badly placed as Belgium. During these days, when all minds are tense, you can easily obtain a freely consented effort toward national discipline. But if you let this unique opportunity pass, if tomorrow Parliament becomes again a fair of lantern-jawing and international insults, your policy of neutrality will collapse and will furnish some people the pretext for blows that may perhaps be mortal."

The King, I could see from the liveliness of his gaze, was struck by my argument.

Deep within himself, like his brilliant great-uncle Léopold II, Léopold III appreciated political agitation only halfway. He worked rather on the margins of Parliament and of the ministers issuing from it. Sometimes he even hid from them. He had his personal cabinet, composed of soldiers and civilians expert in every field, a veritable occult ministry which often thwarted, and sometimes even annulled, the work of the parliamentary government. The formula of ministers, liegemen of the parties,

displeased Léopold III, who would have liked to substitute for them high officials and technicians. He missed no opportunity to snub the professionals of Parliament, abruptly sending them back to their voters, depriving them of expected decorations, as one deprives children of their toys.

Léopold II, speaking of the Palace of the senators and deputies, said “the shack across the way.” Léopold III, more timid, had a less ferocious tooth; but one could guess that parliamentary fetishism did not touch him.

He was not Rexist, at least not publicly. But he knew all the defects of the party regime, and followed with attention movements which, like ours, aimed to reestablish, within states freed from the anarchy of number, the authority of executive power, order, competence, continuity, and the spirit of responsibility.

Nevertheless, my project of the beginning of September 1939 in no way aimed to humiliate an institution that had fallen quite naturally, and for a rather long time, into public disrepute. In my opinion, the moment was badly chosen to indulge in criticisms against the democratic regime and, because of external circumstances, to attempt to sterilize it. My proposal was situated well beyond the old antiparliamentary polemics.

It aimed solely to prevent, in the immediate term, the grossest excesses of the political clans and to allow fruitful work by the executive power, itself a direct emanation of Parliament and of the three great Belgian parties called “democratic.” It was these parties, in the final analysis, that would have to vote these exceptional powers.

As I advanced in my exposition, the King showed increasing interest in this program. At the end, he told me that my proposal was excellent, that he shared my way of seeing things, and that he was going to act in that sense. I left him, at night, trembling with joy, certain that I had helped, for several months —the crucial months, no doubt—to maintain neutrality, that is, to maintain peace for Belgium.

Alas, the King’s good dispositions did not withstand the sour oppositions and the blackmail of the high officials whom he consulted: every parliamentary bungler intended to preserve the right to launch, through the storm, his noisy speeches, to agitate opinion (since, after all, it is by agitating opinion that one conquers it).

The King, firmly decided before me to demand a formula of enlarged powers, thought it preferable to tack when he encountered the first obstacles. He temporized, let the opportunity pass. In the end, nothing happened, and Parliament met again in its agitated eel-trap, amid the usual fever and uproar.

For three whole days, each party delegated to the mahogany tribune its jabberers and haranguers. From the second meeting, the provocations began; remarks insulting to Germany were thrown out. An Ostrogoth named Hubin, a half-senile little lout specialized in projecting spit over long distances, ran, apoplectic, to the foot of the tribune and spat with a full mouth in the direction of his contradictors. Each speech was nothing but a string of quarrels, stupidities, or commonplaces, droned out by botchers.

Prime Minister Pierlot, clasping in his two thin hands his bare skull like a chamber pot, waited, his eye fixed, cadaverous, his mouth bitter, until all these windbags had finished rambling behind their water carafe. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak, thickset, chubby, cramped on his bench, could not manage to cross his little sausage legs; he waved his enormous pink head and his short arms, powerless before these fanfares, these inanities, these bilious outpourings.

I spoke after all these fine people, for only a few minutes, begging the Belgians—a people of the in-between—to keep their cool, not only in order to remain outside the war, but also to be morally prepared to fulfill their duty of fraternity toward men by one day reconciling the enemies of 1939, over the cemeteries and ruins. Spaak pulled with great difficulty from his ministerial bench his blowfish belly. He came to me, hands outstretched, his eye warm, his smile of a jovial living man on the surface of his very small mouth: “You are the only one here who has said something human and sensible!” he declared warmly.

But if, for a few minutes, I had used language inspired solely by the gravity of the drama, if I had, by a miracle, been applauded by all parties, calmed for an instant, the partisan speeches of those three days had already succeeded in completely breaking in the country the spiritual unanimity born on the first day of the European shock.

Echoing the yelping of the Chambers, the hacks and tricksters of the bellicose press threw the underpants at Hitler, dragged him to the pillory, and set off with more vigor than ever in their campaign of falsified news, fabulous imaginary victories, villainies, and tall tales intended to brave the Reich and excite public opinion. To believe these shell-game players, the Polish cavalry was galloping toward Berlin! Across seven columns of the front page, the Siegfried Line had been broken through! Aachen was being crushed under the bombs of French aviation! And we were only at the very first days of the Belgian policy of neutrality!

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II

THE NEUTRAL TOHU-BOHU

Insanity of the international warmongers. - Provocative follies in Belgium. - Venality of the pro-war agitators. - The case of Germany and Italy. - Above the fray. - Mussolini, Rex, and Belgium. - The Reich, a forbidden zone. - Anti-German fanaticism. - German abstention in Belgium. - No fifth column. - Spaak’s friendship.

The Allies had not been able to send their Polish underlings either a submarine or an airplane during their decisive duel of September 1939.

But wars are not won merely with newspaper boasting. The proof had been given, in the very month hostilities broke out, of the aberration represented by this adventure.

Why push Poland to stiffen, to refuse every agreement violently, when those inciting her were not capable of bringing her the slightest help when the reckoning came?

From then on Poland was dead, quite dead, its feet and nose cold forever. The Soviets themselves, braving the Allies, had been able with impunity to confiscate a good third of Polish territory, quite determined to absorb it completely if the German occupier should one day falter.

Thus, by the end of September 1939, the official objective of the Allies’ war had ceased to exist. Poland had been eaten, with Tartar sauce on one side, with “kohlrabi” on the other. Even if the Reich were to fall one day, Poland could only change stomachs, nothing more.

One could therefore still believe that the competitors would stop the expenses after this magnificent fiasco.

At the Maginot Line, Frenchmen and Germans were taming spiders and firing two rifle shots a day. The English were being sent to the continent one by one, with the precautions of stamp collectors. The sacred fire was not there. European opinion balked at the war, a war madly begun by agents provocateurs and fools, a war that no longer had—assuming it had ever had it—the least moral meaning, since the Allies had not dared, on September 15, 1939, to retaliate against the U.S.S.R., which, imitating Hitler—but without cost, and cowardly—had in its turn rushed upon the too naive "protected" state. If the war of September 3, 1939 had followed from Franco-Anglo-Polish pacts, those pacts should have applied just as much against the aggressor Stalin as against the aggressor Hitler. This mess made no sense.

It had to be hoped that serious men would interpose themselves before catastrophe came for all Europe, and then for the whole world.

Hitler had given a very conciliatory speech in Berlin, at the Kroll Opera, on October 6, 1939. Along with peace, he had offered the resurrection of a Poland, certainly reduced (in politics as in love, mistakes are paid for), which was nevertheless worth more for the Poles than complete liquidation under the combined rods of the GPU and the Gestapo.

But insane hatreds had dominated European politics for years. For the Jews, rancorous and vindictive, for the raging Marxists expelled from Central Europe, for the Freemasons who had lost Prague, their capital, for the henchmen of big finance harshly threatened in their profits and peculations by Hitler's gigantic social achievements, it had never been a matter, one can well imagine, of granting or refusing Danzig the quite democratic right to decide freely its own destiny, nor of encouraging or sabotaging the peaceful creation of a corridor, one kilometer wide, between West Prussia and East Prussia. Nor was it a matter of the millions of Poles who had been dropped like dates at the first tangible signs of their misfortune.

Once defeated, they were coldly entered as zero on the asset side of the Allied consortium.

No, the true motives of the war were quite different. It was a question of beating down, as at the beginning of the nineteenth century, an ideological adversary, a possible unifier of the continent, and an economic competitor.

Hitler's peace proposals were rejected with boastfulness and without examination by Daladier, a sepulchral knave, stammering before his bottle of Pernod, and then by the British bus conductor Chamberlain, stiff and narrow-minded as his umbrella.

A frightful clamor of sadistic joy accompanied, across all Europe, this prospect of new slaughters.

That the great press under Allied government orders, that the pickpockets of the Jewish International and of the great trusts should have engaged in such a scalp dance could, at a pinch, be understood. Some were defending their feeding rack, others their field of plunder. But that in neutral countries like Belgium such stamping should occur surpassed understanding.

For after all, if the war really did take place, where was it going to take place? Poland had disappeared.

The Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line closed the only German-Allied front like two strongbox doors. Only one possible battlefield remained: the wide-open lands of the old Low Countries, the eternal battlefield of the French, the English, and the Germans, whether they were called Louis XIV or Louis XV, Dumouriez or Bonaparte, Marlborough or Wellington, Blücher or Wilhelm II. To desire the prolongation of hostilities was to call down nameless horrors upon our soil.

The lickspittles and hyena-kind who, in Belgium, pushed toward these abominations should have been given over to public malediction. The Fatherland had no worse enemies than these provocateurs. Yet they were the ones whom the simpletons proclaimed patriots, while those who, lucidly, wished to keep away from their country the danger that threatened it were dragged through the mud and painted as agents in Hitler's pay.

Leopold III was barely spared when, together with Queen Wilhelmina of Holland, he launched to the belligerents, in November 1939, a vibrant appeal for pacification. What business had these two spoilsports interfering? The king being the King, the press could hardly attack him openly. But this "defeatist" attempt by Leopold III was, from then on, entered on the page of accounts to be settled: it counted for much in the extraordinary flood of calumnies and villainies that submerged the defeated king of the Belgians on May 28, 1940.

A few Brussels intellectuals—laymen and clerics—had the temerity to launch, they too, a message of appeasement. What insults they took: "Hitler's lackeys!" "How much were you paid?" "The voice of their Master!" and so on. Yet these were Belgians, therefore non-belligerents, who had every right to prefer, to a war that would crush their country, an arrangement that would spare it.

This desire for peace was so defensible that the Pope himself, at the end of 1939, made a final attempt at rapprochement. But at the same moment, the Archbishop of Paris published in Paris-Soir a Christmas declaration: in it he rejoiced in the ongoing killings and regarded them as pious works, most pleasing to God. The Brussels press delighted in such lucubrations. Each tried to outdo the others. Everyone wanted, at any price, to enrage the Germans and make any reconciliation, whatever it might be, absolutely impossible.

Journalism had descended to the lowest degree of prostitution. The Brussels dailies published, to heat their blissful readers white-hot, thunderous military columns dated from abroad—from the firing line by preference—masterpieces by "special correspondents" who, laughing to themselves, wrote these texts twenty meters from the very building of their newspaper, at the table of the little café on the corner, in front of a pot of gueuze-lambic.

These jokers could lie as much as they wanted, lie grossly or lie ridiculously, dishonor the news press, put their country in danger. That did not matter. It was even very good. They were good Belgians, true Belgians. But we, who were trying to keep our composure in this mad adventure, to keep the scales straight, to take the side neither of one nor of the other, to show the nation what a catastrophe the end of peace would be for it, we no longer knew how to shelter ourselves from the volleys of rotten missiles and ignominies with which the bellicose hordes overwhelmed us.

These hordes were powerfully sustained by Allied propaganda. In June 1940, after the capitulation, astonishing documentation on this subject was discovered. Not only had most of the pro-war newspapers of 1939 been sold to the Allied secret services, not only were the best-known mandarins of the Belgian press on their payroll, but a swarm of stars of Brussels high society served as information agents for the French Deuxième Bureau. The impoverished nobility had been the most eager to betray

its own people, to draw up and sell little perfidious lists. The president of one of Brussels' most aristocratic clubs was reduced to throwing himself under a tram in July 1940, when it was established, accounting documents in hand, that he was in reality directing one of the largest offices of Gamelin and Daladier's espionage network.

Yet these salon pandours, these blazoned ruffians, these pot-scrapers, puffed out their chests patriotically. And it was we who had to defend ourselves every day against infamous accusations.

Now still, as I did in 1939, as I did in 1940 under full German occupation, I wish to say, to repeat insistently, that never, either before or during the neutrality, did a single pfennig, a single instruction, or even any advice whatever, come to us from the Reich, or on behalf of the Reich, with a view to influencing our line of conduct—which was dictated by the sole concern of sparing our fatherland and Europe the risk of a new devastation of the continent.

Certainly, various points in Rex's program corresponded more or less exactly with a certain number of Fascist or National Socialist principles. Certainly, the great breath of idealism that lifted Italy and the Reich made our souls vibrate, enamored as they were of greatness. We had studied with interest the remarkable recovery achieved for their people by Mussolini and then by Hitler. One had to be a crusty fool or a fanatic to refuse to acknowledge that these two statesmen had magnificent achievements to their credit: restoration of public order; collaboration of the classes; powerful development of their country's economy; respect for workers and extraordinary improvement in their material condition, especially in the Reich; marvelous rebirth of family life (each year one million six hundred thousand births in Hitlerian Germany, that is, one million more than in France, rich, sunny, and blessed by fate); flourishing of youth; development of sports; radiance of artistic life; exaltation of the spirit of community and of civic virtues.

These reforms and achievements, inspired and sustained by a radiant, proud, disinterested mysticism, stood out in democratic Europe, tired, corrupt, without imagination, without fervor, and without faith.

But Fascism and National Socialism were accidental phenomena. There were other problems, preceding Mussolini and Hitler, problems that the disappearance of the two great reformers has in no way eliminated. Those problems too concerned us, as Europeans and as men. We believed that in the distribution of earthly goods, the German people and also the Italian people had not been treated justly. There are injustices between nations exactly as there are social injustices within a nation. Why should worn-out, depopulated nations such as Great Britain and France retain and endlessly monopolize for themselves the rich lands, the colonies, the raw materials? Why was living space acquired only for the countries whose vitality, year by year, was tumbling downward?

By contracting still further the most laborious and prolific people in Europe, the inspirers of the Treaty of Versailles committed an error that lies at the origin of the principal misfortunes of our century. The one million six hundred thousand Germans born each year in Hitler's time had, in all justice, the same right to develop as the rare products of the decadent petty bourgeois of the so-called "democratic" countries, which had in reality become jealously and selfishly conservative countries, conservative of economic privileges, international markets, and millions of square kilometers of often unexploited lands in Asia and Africa.

We believed that the flourishing of the peoples who work the most and have the most children was a question of equity. And also a question of elementary prudence. If one wanted overpopulated Germany not to overflow, one had to find outlets for it, in Europe and outside Europe, and in particular return to

it its former African colonies, which England and France, already satiated, had greedily seized in 1919.

But England, accustomed to taking and rarely to giving back, had turned a deaf ear to every proposal. An island of two hundred forty thousand square kilometers that, before the Second World War, ruled over forty million square kilometers in the world (one hundred sixty-six times its own surface area), England intended that not one acre of colonial land be restored to a Germany almost twice as populous as English soil and bursting everywhere in its shell.

In 1945—supreme folly!—the enormous mass of the Reich's inhabitants was contracted still further, this time driving from their own lands and homes thirteen million Prussians, Pomeranians, Silesians, and Sudetens, stripped of everything, piling them fantastically into a half-Germany in ruins whose density thus reached or exceeded two hundred inhabitants per square kilometer, five times more than on the rich soil of France, seven times more than in artificial Poland. An insane policy that will cause everything to explode, sooner or later, a third time in Europe.

In 1939, the typically selfish and conservative aspect of Anglo-French policy did not escape us, despite the fine "democratic" tirades. The people, for us, meant the people of the world, and not only that of two gorged countries. We would have wished that a solution of justice and equity bring a new equilibrium to Europe by distributing the means of life more humanely and more equitably between the satiated and decadent states and the poor but fertile and dynamic states.

There lay the fundamental problem of European appeasement, apart from passing questions of regimes.

Nevertheless, the interest we took in the experiments and vital claims of the overflowing peoples of Europe changed nothing in our behavior concerning Belgian peace and continental peace. In the autumn of 1939, our duty was clearer and stricter than ever: to seize the last chances that remained for Belgium to escape the war, to remain faithful to our European mission as a country in-between [1], open to reconciliations.

For that, we had to practice the most exact neutrality, honestly and energetically maintain a final landing field for peace in the West. Culturally, we were profoundly linked to France. Politically and socially, we took a lively interest in the new ideas represented by Hitler and Mussolini. But reasonably, as clear-sighted patriots, we wished, in 1939, to remain serenely, totally above the fray, to save our people and to try to save the other peoples.

I shall add, with the most total frankness, that we were subjected to no temptation.

I have been told that in France, in certain circles close to politics and the press, approaches were undertaken by German personalities who did not lack the necessary resources. That is quite in the customs of Paris. To prepare its alliances, formerly, and to place its loans, Tsarism had acted no differently. In Belgium, these collusions did not exist. I speak of what I know: however astonishing it may seem—many will not believe me, but it is so—never, during all these months of neutrality, was I, nor anyone at Rex, the object of the slightest intervention, however discreet, coming from a German or from any emissary of the Germans.

During the winter of "neutrality" the Third Reich took absolutely no interest in its propaganda in Belgium. It let itself be insulted and mocked there without ever reacting. Certainly, had it attempted anything in our direction, it would have been discouraged immediately. We were neutral and claimed to be so honestly. In politics, honesty is doubtless a weakness. We had that weakness. But the fact that the

Reich's propaganda never tried to make the slightest contact with us, even only to provide us with documentation, has always left me wondering.

I knew Hitler personally, as I knew Mussolini personally, as I knew Franco personally, as I had formed many political relations in France in the most varied circles, as I had been the guest, in the Commons, of very amiable British deputies from Winston Churchill's party. I might come to power. My duty was to prepare, for that hour, the international relations that would allow me to work usefully for my country.

But European tension and the bad faith of our adversaries had become such as early as 1937 that I had thought it preferable no longer to maintain relations, even very occasional ones, with the leaders of the Axis.

Before that, we had in Italy many true and ardent friends. On Mussolini's direct advice (with whom I had never had any contact before our great victory of 1936, but who, afterward, had developed a great attachment to me and had received me at his home on several occasions with much affection), certain of our Roman comrades had financially supported our young organizations, materially deprived of everything. But they had always shown absolute disinterestedness, obviously having no political aims of any kind regarding Belgium. They felt sympathy for our ideas, were sensitive to the fire of our ideal, and felt solidarity with our struggle against communism. They also felt, like the Italians of the First World War, a very keen interest in everything concerning the future and security of Belgium. It was Belgium, through Rexism, that they encouraged and loved.

Instead of preaching for their new associates beyond the mountains, they worked—paradoxically—to warn us against our eastern neighbors. Mussolini never spoke to me of the Reich except to give me the strongest counsels of prudence. At bottom, if he secretly admired Germany—with a certain bitterness—the Duce was always, like every Italian, instinctively anti-German. In 1936, he drew for me a caricature-portrait of Ribbentrop, whom he detested, in terms far more colorful and incisive than those used at Nuremberg ten years later by the prosecutors of the Allied Powers.

Thus any idea of an indirect influence of National Socialist Germany exerted on Belgium through the Fascism-Rexism channel must be excluded. Exactly the contrary took place. No one more than Mussolini advised me against contacts with the Third Reich. This was not, on his part, an isolated or momentary opinion. Mussolini's position toward Belgium always remained the same. It went so far that the Duce, in 1939 and 1940, even revealed, for the benefit of our country, essential military secrets that had been communicated to him by his Axis associate, already at war. Having been kept informed of various plans for invasion of the territories of the West by the Wehrmacht, Mussolini, on three occasions, ordered Ciano to inform the Belgian ambassador to the Quirinal, then—to be quite sure of reaching the king of the Belgians directly—to warn Princess Marie-José herself, sister of Leopold III. These secret communications were made on December 26, December 30, 1939, and January 2, 1940. [1] The thanks of King Leopold III were transmitted in writing to Ciano by Princess Marie-José two weeks later, on January 16, 1940, exactly.

These revelations by the Duce had, at the time, considerable repercussions on Belgian foreign policy. On the King's personal order, and without his ministers' knowledge, sudden and astonishing initiatives were taken in January 1940, in the greatest secrecy. We shall speak later of these melodramatic incidents.

Germany, certainly, has the right in this regard to judge Mussolini severely, for he indisputably was not

correct toward his Axis partner. But a fact is a fact. Mussolini, no doubt jealous of Hitler's triumphs and not wishing them to grow out of all proportion, instead of favoring the game of the Third Reich, directly served Belgium's interests at the expense of his associate.

Besides, I repeat, from 1937 onward, hearing the storm of international passions rumbling in the distance, and wishing to avoid anything that might harm the domestic action of Rexism, I had completely ended my contacts with our friends in Italy. The same reserve was observed by all my collaborators. Despite the pleasure I had in meeting Mussolini, a prodigious source of life, experience, and picturesque vigor, I never saw the Duce again. Nor Ciano either, cynical but funny, a devilish observer, sketching pontiffs and pedants with ferocious humor.

These Italian relations were interesting and useful to Belgium. I have often regretted having yielded, by suspending them, to the blackmail of the scum. I should have defied the insulters and held firm. In the end, it was King Leopold himself who was secretly obliged to renew contacts with the chiefs of Fascism. In 1939 he dispatched, in haste and confusion, the socialist (unconscious National Socialist) Henri de Man to Count Ciano, who received him twice. [1] Always the clearly pro-Belgian tendency of Fascism was maintained, whether it manifested itself through me or, incidentally, through de Man, or, in 1939 and 1940, decisively through the active Princess Marie-José, direct liaison agent of Leopold III with Ciano, who became, in the private domain, the strangest and most indiscreet of the confidants of the sister of the king of the Belgians.

Such were the relations among Hitlerism, Fascism, and Rexism. But there was not only Hitlerism and Fascism. All the experiments then under way aroused our curiosity. Thus I sent Xavier de Grünne, head of Rex's senatorial group, on a study mission to Moscow in the summer of 1936. I myself, at the beginnings of Rex, had asked authorization to go to the U.S.S.R. Only the refusal of the Soviet authorities had made me abandon that project at the time.

I was always a great traveler. Before creating Rex, I had gone to Asia, Africa, Canada, the Antilles, and the United States. All the more reason, then, that I had studied closely most of the countries of Europe. It would have been stupid of me to ignore Germany. As a young student I had crossed it from one end to the other by bicycle. I returned there, with increased interest, in 1934, to study the National Socialist phenomenon, but mingling with the crowd, without making contact with the leaders of the Third Reich.

In 1936, during a stay in Berlin—an excursion trip in the company of my wife and two friends—Ribbentrop came to visit me at the Hotel Kaiserhof, where we were all staying. He invited me to lunch at his simple and beautiful property in Dahlem, hidden among the firs. After the meal, he and I went to have tea with Hitler.

It was an unprepared meeting, a very lively and very interesting meeting, which had allowed me to hear Hitler state a quite original proposal for settling the thorny Belgian-German dispute of Eupen-Malmédy. I later reported the meeting to the King. Unfortunately the meeting had no sequel, because at the mere announcement that I had spent two days in the capital of the Reich (I had not revealed that I had been received by Hitler, the invitation having been private; people merely thought that I had seen Goebbels, who at that moment was... in Athens), the democratic press unleashed itself with such stupid, savage, brutalizing fanaticism that I left matters there and preferred, from then on, to renounce any further contact with the head of the Third Reich.

That was regrettable, for Belgium, a land of exchanges, should have had good relations with all its neighbors, and particularly with the most powerful of them. If there were difficulties, the best means of

smoothing them out was to know one another, to explain oneself man to man, in all frankness. But four years before the war already, the Belgian newspapers and parties were so poisoned by anti-German hatred and by French subsidies that one had to renounce knowing anything at all about what was happening in the Reich and rely exclusively on gossip, distortions, and provocative lies from the great Jewish agencies. To want to see for oneself the life of National Socialist Germany was, in Belgium as in France, to commit political suicide.

A gigantic experiment was developing. The most important country in Europe—by itself more populous than France, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Norway combined—was renewing itself. Absolute prohibition on visiting it, looking, listening. And this in peacetime, in 1936. Otherwise, if one had the audacity to set foot in the Reich for a weekend, it was the general assault of the "democratic" press. It was uproar and a river of mud. Fine "freedom" that was.

I just barely went again to Czechoslovakia and Austria in the spring of 1938. I took great care not to pass through Berlin again, crossed southern Germany at full speed in twenty-four hours, and returned by airplane. Exactly as if I had committed a bad deed.

That is the degree of intolerance Europe had reached, months and years before "Munich."

I was also obliged to forbid my friends to travel in the Reich, so extraordinary were the fanaticism and blackmail of our adversaries. With a will to lie that nothing any longer stopped, directors of high-circulation newspapers, such as the socialist Wallonie of Liège, went so far as to publish, as a crushing document, photographs they had doctored in their own editorial office. They had substituted for the body of Hitler, passing with arm raised among the Nazi flags of Nuremberg, that of the head of our group of deputies, Pierre Daye, extracted from a photograph in which he was giving the Rex salute at the exit from Parliament in Brussels. The fraud was flagrant. We published side by side the Brussels photograph and the Nuremberg one. The Press Association—presided over by a Freemason, a French agent who was to roll at the feet of the victorious Germans in 1940 and immediately put his pen at their service—did not even deign to disavow these villainies, nor to address a reproach to the falsifiers. The smallest details engendered frenzied campaigns. In 1937—1937!—a great uproar was made in the left-wing press because a German car had parked one evening in front of the building on Avenue Molière where my wife, my children, and I then lived. That car was the proof of the plot, of Hitler's maneuvers in Belgium, and of my treason. What was there in this car story? Nothing. No German had visited me. There were ten or twelve apartments in the building. No doubt, one evening, another tenant had received the visit of some citizen of the Reich. Which tenant? On which floor? I never knew. The newspapers knew no more than I.

Even if I had received Germans one evening, what crime would there have been in that? In Belgium I practiced exactly the same discretion as abroad. I maintained not the slightest relation with the German embassy, while I met at Pierre Daye's house personalities from the French embassy and lunched with bigwigs from His Britannic Majesty's embassy. Neither in Brussels nor anywhere else did I have, direct or indirect, any contact of any kind with a German or with a man trusted by the Germans.

During the great offensives of Rex in 1936, the Brussels correspondent of a German press agency had come to my house seeking news, like his foreign colleagues. If I remember correctly, his name was Bayer, like the pharmaceutical firm. He is the only German in Belgium to whom I said four words during those years.

It was lamentable to be thus totally cut off from all contact with Belgium's most important neighbor at

the very moment when study of its activity would have made it possible to make so many instructive observations. I could send Xavier de Grünne to Moscow to study the workings of the U.S.S.R. That was fine. I myself could stay in London in order to see British democracy functioning. That was fine.

But to lean, for an instant, as a mere observer, over the enormous German boiler in eruption was automatically to condemn oneself to months of genuine journalistic terrorism, to see one's portrait posted on all the walls of the country, topped with a spiked helmet, to hear hundreds of delirious blockheads and harpies frenetically scream "To Berlin! To Berlin!" at each of your meetings.

Hitler himself had given up on the possibility of improving his country's relations with Belgium and Holland (fanatical too, though with less vehemence). By November 1939, as we shall see, he had been informed by German espionage services in France of the verbal conventions that had just been concluded, in the greatest secrecy, between Leopold III's General Staff and the Allied generalissimo Gamelin.

The German propaganda services in no way tried to redress the situation. One would think that every effort to enlighten Belgian ruling circles had appeared to them doomed in advance to failure. From the start of the war, Germany normally should have sent to the editorial offices of the Belgian dailies documentation, information, reports, maps, photographs. French and English inundated us with such papers. Yet not once did we receive the slightest printed matter from the Reich. Nothing. It was even absolutely extraordinary. I often remarked on it to my editors. Not only did no German, or delegate of German propaganda, seek during the whole duration of neutrality to enter into contact with us to explain his country's point of view or speak to us of its war effort, but never was a single sheet of documentation, tendentious or not, sent to us. German abstention was total.

It must have been so in all Belgian circles. I asked many questions on this subject after the invasion of 1940, when tongues had been loosened. I learned of only one exception, absurd moreover, because it was of no real interest to the Reich: a Belgian, with clearly Israelite physical and moral characteristics, who directed a small weekly, received from the Reich embassy in Brussels a sum of three hundred thousand francs or four hundred thousand francs during the winter of 1939-1940. I no longer remember the exact figure, but it was one of those two. This gratuity was handed to the mercenary in question by a young attaché of the German embassy, Dr. Max Liebe. It was piously entered in the weekly's accounts under a rather unexpected heading: "Donation from Finland." Brave Finland!

An amusing detail: the beneficiary of this Nazi subsidy had been a libelist for Prime Minister Van Zeeland during his campaign against Rex in 1936-1937. He had long been on familiar terms with Spaak, who, when he had been appointed—it was his beginning—Minister of Communications, had assured him a purely complimentary salary of one thousand francs per month, at the expense of the Belgian state, without the discreet prebendary being required to do any work whatever. During the neutrality, while he was pocketing Dr. Max Liebe's banknotes, this pamphleteer came to visit the Minister of Foreign Affairs at any hour, even hunting him down in his bathroom, from which good fat Spaak would emerge streaming, crimson, his hair like a hunting horn, draped like a Roman matron in a gaudy bathrobe, or bundled into an amusing short house-jacket.

On May 10, 1940, the first day of the war in the West, thousands of innocent Belgians were shamefully arrested as "sold out." But that man, the only French-speaking Belgian who had touched German money, was, of course, troubled by no one. He peacefully witnessed the capitulation of May 28, 1940. His friend Dr. Liebe immediately afterward provided him with a post of the first magnitude. And from the newspaper where he had been installed, he hastened to lard with poisoned arrows the majestic

backside of M. Spaak, his former protector.

I am almost certain that this example is unique. The Allies seized all the Reich's official documents in 1945. And I imagine that their discovery must have cruelly disappointed the scandal-sniffers and the gullible, for it is established in the clearest manner that there was no fifth column in Belgium.

At the Nuremberg tribunal the Reich's propaganda plan before 1940 and the preparatory work of the various "Quislings" in Europe were reconstructed meticulously, country by country. What was established against Rex? Against me? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Except the opposite of what our slanderers had so much wanted to prove. No document was produced at the bar, because all the German documents showed peremptorily that our relations with the Reich before the war were nonexistent, that I had in no way been a Quisling, that I had known nothing of the plans for German troops to enter Belgium, from the first to the last day of neutrality. They may have turned over all the dossiers and examined these archives with a magnifying glass. My patriotic loyalty emerged brilliantly from these multiple confrontations with the facts.

In 1939 already, our political adversaries knew perfectly well what to think about the infamies poured out upon Rex and upon me by the tricksters and rogues of the "democratic" press.

Paul-Henri Spaak, better able than anyone, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, to know the ramifications of foreign propaganda in Belgium, never for an instant doubted my sincerity. He knew my independence, my patriotism, my concern to spare my country the war. In the middle of a session of the Chamber of Deputies, he was not afraid to come and sit ostentatiously beside me, for he openly and warmly approved my foreign policy, which was, moreover, absolutely in conformity with the one he himself professed at that time.

I wished to go to France to spend the Christmas holidays with my French in-laws. It was Spaak personally who, with his usual affability, settled the question of my visa with the French ambassador. Frankly, if I had been suspect in his eyes, would Spaak himself have taken such a step with the representative of the French government in Belgium? And if the French government had had the slightest doubt about the honesty of my neutrality policy, would it have granted me authorization, in the middle of war, to stroll about on its territory and spend my winter vacation there in the company of soldiers coming down from the front?

In Paris I met again, coming directly from the Maginot Line, my brother-in-law, a young officer candidate, and my father-in-law, a reserve captain who, despite his fifty-seven years, had left his factories and cheerfully gone back as a volunteer to the Alsace front; he was to die for France a few months later. I spent a week with them, joking and strolling. My father-in-law and I were intimate friends. I admired his noisy and incandescent patriotism. His duty, as a Frenchman, once the war was under way, was to fight. My duty, as a Belgian, so long as the war spared Belgium, was to keep that catastrophe away from my country while launching to Europe the last peaceful appeals that might still, perhaps, save it from the abysses of fire and blood toward which it was rushing.

No one heard my appeals. Nor anyone's appeals. World War Number 2, desired and sought by thousands of blockheads and furious madmen, took place all the same. The results are there: frightful ruins, bitterness everywhere, the European continent completely dislocated, ripe for the worst social and political convulsions.

I understood only too well, already in 1939, that it would be so. One did not need to be an eagle, nor to

fly very high, to imagine in advance the possible scale of the disaster. But trying to prevent that disaster was a crime. A crime that we, my faithful followers and I, were going to pay for during years. A crime that we were going to pay for dearly, in baths of tears and blood.

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III

THE LODGES AT WORK

Pierlot, a hypocritical block of ice. - Spaak, the smiling cynic. - Paul-Émile Janson and the Jansonides. - The fourteen categories of suspect servicemen. - New visit to the King. - His promises. - Janson's stubborn duplicity. - Bovesse, governor of Namur and agent of the French Deuxième Bureau. - Freemasonry at the King's Palace.

In September 1939, fear of war had managed for a few days to lessen partisan hatreds in Europe's neutral countries. But no more than two or three weeks were needed for everyone to reinstall, within the "phoney war," the prejudices and furies of former days. In Belgium as elsewhere, insults and slanderous accusations again flew like thousands of darts.

The Belgian government, during these months in which the peace of our country and the future of Europe were at stake, should at least have formed an island of patriotism, loyalty, and objectivity. But how could that have been possible in a democratic regime where power depends only on parties, is their slave, and must share and espouse their passions on pain of perishing? Party governments live, and can live, only in tumult, bad faith, and hatred, as pike live in water, bats in shadow, and toads in the insipidness of marshes.

The Belgian prime minister of 1939 was called, if one remembers, Pierlot. Dull and gloomy, he was a dyspeptic with bony cheekbones and the glassy eye of a sour anchorite. He had never laughed, not even while looking at himself in his mirrored wardrobe. This hard-headed killjoy was loved only by caricaturists. He spoke in the distant, refrigerating tone of the unlucky teetotaler who has just learned that his farm has burned down, that his bank has collapsed, and that his mother-in-law has fallen from a height of twenty meters without hurting herself. Deputies approached him as they would a coffin, with a dismayed air, instinctively searching with their hand for the boxwood branch and holy water.

At first people tended to pity the decomposed gaze of this undertaker. But the man had not been dried up by a whim of fate. His heart was as frozen as his face; he was capable--as was later seen--of committing, out of ambition or aversion, the worst cruelties. Officially respectable, brother of a plump and apoplectic canon, this sour bigot was to order and pay for, from London during the war, the most ignoble and vile assassinations recorded in Belgian history: murders of hundreds of relatives, women, and children of his ideological adversaries, and in particular of Belgian volunteers of the Eastern Front. He was to boast of these abject crimes in a demagogic speech to his voters at Bertrix in 1945. But he collapsed soon afterward in general contempt.

The foreign minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, was the exact opposite of Pierlot the undertaker: entirely round, well-spoken, a good drinker, a good eater, he was pink as a cubic meter of fresh charcuterie.

Honest where money was concerned, he was totally devoid of scruples in politics. Bald very early, with a plump back, short-legged like a gull, he had passed smilingly from socialist-communist street fights to ministerial flexibility exercises. He played the most varied roles with a perfect knowledge of human comedy: here a demagogue, there silver-tongued, sensitive and charming, too intelligent to be taken in by his own game and, because of that, capable of carrying out the most astonishing and unexpected about-faces, with a naturalness and cynicism that belonged at once to prodigy and farce.

Cultivated, he had an eloquence discreetly inflated, with well-bred tremolos, that always seduces popular assemblies. He was conscious of his superiority as an intellectual and moneyed bourgeois over the bumpkins of his party. He showered these simpletons with cleverly measured compliments, but he kept his distance. He even allowed himself strange liberties with democracy, sometimes rejoining, at the end of night sittings, the benches of the Socialist Party, dressed in an impeccable dinner jacket, a carnation in his buttonhole, a touch of rice powder on his shoulder, his complexion blooming from distinguished libations.

Spaak has been in every kind of ministry: pro-Catholic, anti-Catholic, conservative, anti-conservative. He has been a republican; he has been a monarchist. He flattered Léopold III. Then he dragged him through the mud. Then he crawled at his feet. Then he banished him. But he would put him back on the throne tomorrow, with the same conviction in his words, if he found any personal interest in a Leopoldian restoration. Fundamentally, he has always been extremely logical. Being intelligent, he believes in no one; he makes an exception only for himself, and even then with a smile, solely because it is an old acquaintance of his and he could not decently be cruel to himself. But he has no more illusions about his own person than about anyone else.

Faith, in politics, is an almost mortal handicap. The man who believes in something is always stopped by his conscience. From the outset he loses fifty chances out of a hundred of achieving success. Spaak, believing in nothing, is stopped by nothing, and above all he takes nothing tragically. Why should he take tragically attitudes which in his eyes are only sleights of hand or virtuous buffooneries? Serious when he pontificates, not laughing at the altar, ambitious but with an ambition restrained by the capitalist good breeding he received, intelligent but with an intelligence careful never to crush necessary imbeciles, supple, capable of the most extraordinary pirouettes while always saving appearances, making, scarcely having landed with both feet on the track, professions of faith so eloquent that those who were laughing or indignant are seized by doubt or emotion--a polished conjurer, sure of himself, cynical, but with a cynicism so nuanced that it takes the form of superiority of mind--Spaak was bound to succeed. His failure would have been the very condemnation of the most classic procedures of political tactics.

He is the most gifted specialist there is in conservative demagogy, having over the bourgeois the superiority of the leader who disposes of the masses, while dominating, by all his social skill, his rough-hewn Marxist colleagues, stagehands who had passed heavily, after several decades, from their factory to Parliament or to the direction of a second-rank ministry, self-taught men uncomfortable in their clothes, flanked moreover by impossible wives, married too early, whose presence paralyzes them.

During the winter of 1939-1940, Spaak, loyal to the King (without whom there would have been no Minister Spaak), had espoused--provisionally, for with him everything is provisional!--the apparent royal policy of neutrality. In Parliament he overwhelmed me with kindnesses. This bulky fellow, with the compact body of a bull but the smile of a Cadum baby, is amiable without effort. No one demanded my head more loudly than he in 1945 and 1946. But it was not out of hatred, I am certain of it. In 1945

and 1946, the voter wanted blood. The wind was blowing toward cannibalism. Spaak followed the wind, even tried to run faster than it.

But let the wind turn tomorrow, let a new tornado change the face of the world, and no one will be more eager than Spaak to offer me--once again--the chance to team up with him.

He is a twentieth-century Talleyrand--devalued, of course, like everything else--with the paunch added, the clubfoot missing, having thrown off demagogic pullovers as the other had sent the episcopal capes flying, a little less caustic, because fat men are naturally more conciliatory, but as adroit and undulating in Brussels and at the U.N. as the former bishop of Autun was, for or against Napoleon, with or without kings, in London, Paris, and the Congress of Vienna. Both triumphed because, in addition to intelligence, social skill, and ambition, they possessed that total indifference toward principles without which, in politics, there is no success and, above all, no durability.

The most perfidious element of all in this Belgian government of neutrality was not Pierlot, venomous as a naja but a small-time sacristan; nor was it Spaak, a troubadour, professional tightrope walker, aggressive, tortuous, or theatrical in the heat of ambition, but incapable of resorting coldly to malice and vileness. The evil genius of this political team, the one who was going to make ignoble use of the dramatic circumstances of 1939-1940 in order secretly to set for his political adversaries a monstrous trap of low police work, was a man as insensitive as quartz, with small metallic blue eyes, roundish, goateed, haughty, with a shiny melon-shaped skull: Paul-Émile Janson.

The Janson tribe--commonly called in Brussels the Jansonides--belonged to that Freemasonic bourgeoisie so powerful in Belgium, rich in cultivated men, disdainfully and without cost employing, for the low work, a whole clientele of grumbling little earners, settled year after year in the public administrations.

The Jansonides reigned despotically amid the proud liberal mafia, where they had imposed themselves for half a century, later overflowing widely, men and women, toward socialism (Spaak was Paul-Émile Janson's nephew) when that party provided a better electoral return.

Abandoning no member of the clan along the way, the Jansonides politically formed the most important caste in Brussels, in the Chamber of Deputies, in the Senate, in the Government, and in the civil and military magistracy. They could not do everything. But they could do a great deal. They were called by their first names, like kings. Spaak was Paul-Henri. Janson was Paul-Émile.

Paul-Émile was an old operator. Wary and insinuating, he had for fifty years taken part in every Masonic conclave and prepared the most shadowy political torpedoings. Having returned to the Government in 1939 after a long eclipse, he slowly moved through Parliament his square torso like a pick-up, planted on the tribe's usual short legs. Despite his age he had kept the biting phrase, the sharp and imperative tone. With a padded neck and a pink, ovoid skull, he interrupted speakers in ten dry words.

He was always courteous with me. But human beings do not deceive me. From the first glance I divine men, as though a surge from my being plunged a secret thermometer into the souls of others. Never has that diagnosis led me astray. Those fluids are much surer than all the analyses of the mind. Every time that, yielding to the prayers of conciliatory friends, I failed to take account of that first instinctive judgment, I regretted it, sometimes bitterly. In this varnished Janson, with sharp lips and little steel eyes, I was certain that I had sounded abysses of hatred.

Never, however, would I have imagined that this man who, like his whole race, made a profession of patriotism, was going to use these prewar months to mount against his political adversaries the vilest--and, alas!--the bloodiest maneuver ever carried out by a member of the Government in Belgium.

One day, an absolutely terrified senior officer of the Gendarmerie came to my house. He took from his pocket a secret order from his chief. The latter, at Janson's request, enjoined all his subordinates to draw up the list of fourteen categories of suspect servicemen, to be incarcerated in case of war!

These fourteen categories represented exactly all shades of public opinion that did not belong to the three governmental parties. Thus, at the moment when seven hundred thousand Belgians were under arms, when we ourselves, out of patriotism, were granting the Government the vote of confidence of our parliamentary group, while the latter possessed not the slightest proof of any anti-national propaganda within the army or even outside the army; at the moment when the country should have been made into one single bloc and one single soul, a sectarian minister had committed the infamy of ordering that these abominable files be secretly drawn up, consigning in advance to dishonor, if war broke out, tens of thousands of loyal and honest soldiers who, before the storm, might not have entirely shared, in domestic politics, this or that idea of the Freemasons, Marxists, or international bankers, but who, in their regiments, thought only of their duty, of the defense of their homes and their fatherland!

This satanic maneuver, this abyss of ignominy, at first left me inert. What! In the shadow of a ministry, so monstrous a trap had been set up to snare the former opposition (for since our pro-governmental vote of September 1939, we were not even in opposition any longer); these exceptional circumstances had been used to prepare the roundup that would brand with red-hot iron the former electoral opponents of the three traditional parties! I could not bring myself to believe it. It seemed too horrible. Yet the text was there, in my hands, the official order, followed by the official signature!

One can imagine what a dramatic reversal would have occurred if I had made this secret document known to the country, what indignation would have lifted the army if it had learned that, at such an hour, reviving the most abominable traditions of Freemasonry at the beginning of the century, orders had been given to establish, in fourteen categories, files on countless "suspects," officers and soldiers--not only pro-communists or Trotskyists (who, moreover, were quiet at that moment), but also Rexists, Flemish nationalists, the Dinasos of Joris van Severen, the National Legion, National Action, etc.

Janson was an intelligent man. He could not have been unaware that such a fanatical measure risked, if it became known, completely knocking down the morale of the army. But political passion had been stronger, and Janson the Mason had asked that, among the troops, perhaps on the eve of an attack at the frontier, files be drawn up on thousands of political adversaries to be incarcerated and degraded as soon as the occasion of war permitted.

For a few hours I hesitated over the decision to be taken. I should have gone straight up to the rostrum of Parliament, interpellated the Government, read this document aloud, and unmasked before the whole country the repugnant manipulator who, by electoral calculation, was sabotaging the unanimity of the Fatherland. I had within reach of my blows this old traitor--yes, traitor, for it was the worst of treasons to split the army in two in this way, to try to stain the honor of thousands of officers and soldiers, with no justification other than the will to eliminate, by this coup de force, a former political opposition.

Janson would have been crushed under these revelations. Anger would have raised up the healthy elements of the country. But where would this scandal have led? The morale of the nation would have

emerged from it terribly damaged. What courage would the army still have had, what confidence would it have kept in the State, if it had learned that shameless politicians could, without the shadow of a justification, prepare behind the backs of the troops, out of ambition and hatred, such repugnant plots? In conscience, I could not answer Janson's criminal maneuver with an outburst that would have weakened my fatherland. I preferred to master my indignation, swallow my tongue, and settle the incident man to man with the King. I wrote to him that I had a very important communication to make to him.

When I had informed Léopold III of this unworthy maneuver tending to divide the army into two clans--"the good," those who were amorphous or supported the old professional politicians; "the bad," those who had dreamed, before neutrality, of legally reforming the institutions of their country--the Sovereign refused to believe that such a cowardly, such a tortuous order could have been given officially, especially at such a moment. To convince the King, all I had left to do was to take from my pocket the order itself, the authentic signed document. And I added: "Sire, I am not going to let the unity of the country be stabbed in this way, nor allow our comrades under the colors to be dishonored. I have here the means to deal the governmental parties a terrible blow. I am ready to renounce this easy victory. But on one condition: that this infamous order be withdrawn without delay."

"Trust me," the King replied. "I too find this measure unworthy. It will be annulled. I give you my word."

The order was in fact withdrawn. It is to this intervention by the King, set in motion following my approach, that the Belgian army owes not having received Janson's knife in its back on 10 May 1940.

Can one imagine what would have happened if this gigantic razzia had taken place? And what excuse was there for this monstrous plan?

Were traitors seen in the Belgian army on 10 May? The conduct of our soldiers, everywhere, was exemplary, Rexists and anti-Rexists falling, fraternally mingled, to defend the soil of their country. How many of these glorious soldiers would have been arrested on 10 May 1940 and covered with infamy if the King had not stopped in time the plot of the Jansons and their clique?

Janson had pretended to submit to the royal will. In fact, neither he nor the Lodges had renounced their plan. They were going to return the shuttlecock to us and avenge their setback with diabolical spite. Having been forced, despite himself, to renounce the use of those fourteen lists of "suspect" servicemen, Janson had other secret orders issued so that the same preparations for electoral dynamiting would be made, but at the expense of civilians this time.

I was stupid in believing in the patriotism of a Janson and in thinking that a royal wish could take precedence in him over an order from the Lodges. I did not for a second consider the possibility of a second ambush. Had I been more suspicious, I would have demanded Janson's dismissal. But I was so sincerely desirous of disturbing the country in no way that I refrained from asking the Sovereign for this defenestration, which would have brought about an undesirable governmental crisis at such a moment. My naivety was, three months later, to cost the lives of twenty-one martyrs and the liberty of thousands of our comrades.

I had not only submitted to Léopold III the case of the files imagined by the police hounds of the Janson gang. I had also informed the King of the intrigues being carried on, on behalf of a foreign power, in the provinces of Namur and Hainaut, by very important officials of the Ministry of the

Interior and Public Instruction.

The governor of the Province of Namur at that time was a certain Bovesse, a vulgar, broad-footed, always thundering obese man. He had a monkfish head, enormous round eyes flush with the eyebrows, shiny hair falling onto his shoulders, and was always topped with a great black felt hat like a cowboy in mourning. He willingly baritoned in taverns in order to flatter the dullards and simpletons of his political clientele. He had even, playing the local bard, committed a few macaronic pieces.

An old pal of Janson, a three-point brother like him, the said Bovesse, governor of a province of a neutral country, was at the same time the principal French agent in southern Belgium. At the end of 1939, he had just supplied the Deuxième Bureau in Paris with a list comprising the names of several hundred Belgian guides (two per locality in his province) on whom the French Military Command could count if it decided to undertake the invasion of our country.

A Namur shopkeeper, a member of the French intelligence services during the war of 1914-1918, had agreed, in September 1939, to enter this Bovesse team. He had learned of its ramifications in Namur, Charleroi, and Andenne. Horrified by what he had seen, he had come to me, wracked with remorse, asking me to warn the Government. I preferred to warn the King personally.

But the King was often weak. (And besides--I would learn it only later--he himself had allowed himself, with great imprudence, to be caught, since the end of October 1939, in the nets of General Gamelin and the French General Staff.) He had had the orders aimed at the fourteen categories of "suspect" servicemen quashed. He did not risk going further.

For it was the enormous Masonic machine that he would have had to confront: Janson was a Freemason; General Denis, Minister of National Defense, an old stuttering dotard, was a Freemason; Bovesse was a Freemason. The war was not only the war of the Jews and the Marxists; it was also the war of the Lodges.

The Masonic inspirers of Janson, Denis, and Bovesse were on the other side of our southern frontier; they wanted the war that would reestablish their domination in Central Europe, especially in Czechoslovakia, the former vice-royalty of the all-powerful three-point lords à la Beneš.

The very Palace of our monarchs was stuffed with high-ranking officers of Freemasonry. Léopold I had been an important dignitary of the Lodges. Since that time, the royal Palace had been powerfully "occupied." Léopold III, despite his religious convictions, had had to appoint, willingly or unwillingly, a Freemason as chief of his Cabinet.

The King's efforts therefore stopped at the revocation of the Janson edict against suspect servicemen.

The Masonic saboteurs and spies remained taboo. They would quickly attain their goal.

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IV

NEUTRALITY DEFEATED

Our poverty, our independence. - The Gamelin-Léopold III "conventions." - Hitler aware of everything. - The German aircraft of January 10, 1940. - Léopold III's appeal to the Allies. - The Belgian frontier opened. - The English refusal to guarantee clearly the integrity of Belgium and the Congo. - The King's retreat. - The Allies resolved, in March and April 1940, to enter Belgium. - The English and French ultimatums ready in the two embassies in Brussels. - My imprisonment on May 10, 1940.

I had deliberately renounced using in public the terrible arguments I would have had at my disposal by revealing the orders given by Minister Janson concerning the fourteen files of "suspects" to be chosen from the ranks of the Belgian army.

I had kept silent because, from the first of September 1939, I had abandoned the struggle on the plane of domestic politics.

In all honesty, the Jansons and their like ought to have been grateful to me for my generosity. They ought to have answered my patriotic attitude by working themselves to reconcile the various spiritual families of our country. Exactly the opposite occurred.

The alarm behind the scenes of the Lodges had been sharp. My intervention with the King had shown that I knew how to dot the i's, bar the road to the bellicists, and thwart their most secret plans. It was therefore necessary to redouble the violence against me and to attack with increased force that bastion of neutrality which my newspaper constituted.

It was a frightful assault.

The last months of our struggle for peace were unspeakable. We were dragged through the mire from morning to night as "agents of the foreigner," we who, in fact, were the only ones who placed the country's interest before every other.

Then they tried to destroy us materially. We lived in the most extreme poverty. Month after month, for the defense of our cause, I had liquidated my last personal resources. Our daily, Le Pays réel, like all newspapers, lived only thanks to its advertising. They hurled themselves at our advertisers. Scarcely had an industrialist or a shopkeeper entrusted an advertising order to our paper when he received twenty, thirty, fifty letters of insult and threat. This service of terrorism was remarkably organized. It acted with mathematical precision and with such violence that our clients ran in, terrified, asking for the cancellation of their contracts.

The families who published death notices in our columns were not spared. Even at the foot of a coffin there fell an avalanche of anonymous letters. It even happened--one hesitates to write such things--that certain families received parcels filled with excrement.

Our commercial receipts collapsed in a few weeks. Soon the publication of the paper became, every evening, a problem. Until the end of 1939, we had printed Le Pays réel with a hairy skinflint named Wellens-Pay--pay first!--a type of the Wandering Jew, with weeping eyes, dressed in a filthy cloak, always carrying in his urine-colored beard crusts of bread, scraps of bone, and streaks of shining sauce. Seeing where we stood financially, he asked us to go blacken our paper elsewhere. We emigrated to the most modest printer in Brussels, an energetic cripple named Flament, who worked in unbelievable conditions, at the lowest price. One had to climb a little stairway to reach his workshop, where a few workers bumped into old, rickety, greasy machines.

The first number printed under these conditions, that of New Year's Day 1940, appeared with a delay of almost twenty-four hours. The photograph of the King formed a shapeless placard that resembled a night storm on the Malabar coast as much as the Sovereign's face. We had to toil in that way for four months, supervising the typesetting and layout ourselves, each time wondering how we would pay for the number then being manufactured. For it had to be paid for every day, before the number went out.

After clearing the work at the Rex movement's central office, then sitting through hours of flat-handed wrangling and foolishness in Parliament, I ran to the paper around four o'clock. Immediately I wrote thirty large pages in succession, the equivalent of five or six columns of the daily. My sheets were taken, as they were produced, to the linotype operators. While watching the teletype and dictating the headlines, I swallowed two raw-meat sandwiches bought for one franc apiece from a butcher nearby. Then I set out in search of the four or five thousand francs needed to pay for the night's issue.

What evenings! I ran from house to house among faithful Rex men: one hundred francs here, two hundred francs there, fifty francs somewhere else. One had to be amiable, stop, toss down a glass of fine, or Armagnac, or Schiedam, or triple-sec, see the children in their beds, congratulate the grandfather on his vigor, listen to the grandmother's memories of youth. When eleven o'clock arrived and I was still far from the sum, I thought with anguish of the newspaper that would not appear. Sometimes I ran until midnight, half past midnight. Every evening, until May 10, 1940, I had to lead this annihilating life. At last I arrived at the printing shop. The boss was at the corner of the little black stairway, watching for my return. I took the banknotes and the small change from my pockets. Then he gave the order to go full speed. I put on overalls and worked with the workers until the first copies had appeared, smeared and shining, at the end of the old rotary press.

Such was our fight for neutrality, such our poverty, such our independence.

The most tragic thing in all this is that the policy of neutrality had, without our knowledge, been virtually liquidated.

King Léopold had not had an easy life. Subject to ever stronger pressures, he had had to tack and concede. Believing his country threatened, he had had to make offers successively to each of the opposing sides; hence a policy which, at first sight, on reading the documents published since 1940, might be regarded as a policy of double-dealing, whereas in reality it was always governed by an immutable principle: to try to keep Belgium out of the war or, if that was impossible, at least to mitigate the consequences for our people.

The war had not yet broken out when the head of the French armies, Gamelin, had done everything to win Daladier, his president of the Council, over to the idea of advancing his troops toward the Rhine through Belgium. In a memorandum dated September 1, 1939, the Allied generalissimo regarded passage through Belgium as "the single route" for an "offensive" action by France against Germany. As a precise accountant, Gamelin added: "This position would keep the war away from the French frontiers, particularly from our rich provinces of the North."

To fight the battle outside France had always been the great preoccupation of the French High Command, whether it had at its head Napoleon III, Joffre, or Pétain.1 Even before Munich, even before the Anschluss, on March 7, 1938, Gamelin, in his Mémento on the general conduct of war on land (0.990-3-EMA), quite plainly envisaging an offensive "on Belgian or Luxembourg territory," had bluntly posed the question: "In the event that the Belgians did not give us passage through their

territory, could we deliberately violate it, when, in the hypothesis envisaged, the Germans would have respected it?" 1 Belgium, by its geographical position, strategically forms part of France. (GAMELIN, Servir, vol. III, p. 25.) General Debeney, one of the most prominent members of the Superior War Council, at the meeting held by that body under the presidency of the President of the Republic, on June 4, 1932--already--had declared: "In the event that the Belgians were hostile to us, we would have to enter their territory despite them... In any case, it is onto Belgian territory that we would have to move in order to ensure the defense of the northern region." Two years later, considering the defense of those same coalfields, Marshal Pétain would be no less categorical: "The fortifications that would be established on the frontier would no longer protect them. We must go into Belgium." Stenographic report of the meeting of the Army Committee in the French Senate, March 7, 1934, p. 65.

Gamelin was always the resolute partisan of the offensive through Belgium: "On the strategic plane," he writes bluntly, "it was of the greatest interest to seek to weld to the Allied disposition the twenty Belgian divisions whose equivalent could not be obtained on our own soil, because of our declining birthrate." (Servir, vol. III, p. 423.)

England no less wished, in the event of continental war, to assure herself control of the coast of the old Low Countries, situated within cannon range of English soil. Already four months before the fight, when the democratic bellicists at last saw the hope of a conflagration gleaming, the problem of an extension of the war into Belgium had been put on the table in London.1 Those plans and Gamelin's formal proposal to Daladier of September 1, 1939, were examined in the very month of the declaration of war by France and the United Kingdom.

"The problem," writes Gamelin (Servir, vol. I, pp. 83-84), "had first been broached in a conversation between President Daladier, Lord Hankey, Minister of Production, and Mr. Hore-Belisha, Minister of War of Great Britain, which took place in the former's office on September 20, and to which I was summoned. We decided there to enter secretly into relations with the Belgian government. The question had also been raised during the sitting of the Supreme Inter-Allied Council of September 22 at Howe."

The approaches were immediately undertaken. They quite rapidly resulted in a secret agreement: "At the beginning of November," writes Gamelin (Servir, vol. I, p. 84), "we had reached an agreement with the Belgian General Staff."

Churchill, in the second volume of his Memoirs, The Gathering Storm (p. 88), confirmed these secret negotiations and the agreement that concluded them: "General Gamelin, negotiating secretly with the Belgians, stipulated first that the Belgian army would be maintained at full strength and, second, that the defenses of Belgium would be prepared on the advanced line running from Namur to Louvain. At the beginning of November, agreement had been reached with the Belgians on all points."

The Belgian government, for its part, had pressed King Léopold strongly to negotiate with the Allies.

The Belgian prime minister of the time, Pierlot, related in an article in the Brussels newspaper Le Soir of July 9, 1947, how he had "persuaded" the King to enter into contact with the Franco-British and to prepare a "military collaboration" with them: "The Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of National Defense, who had been delegated by the Council to deal with the King on the most secret affairs, requested an audience and were received at Laeken on November 8, 1939. Resuming the exchange of views which had already been the subject of several interviews without result, the ministers insisted in the most pressing manner in order to persuade the King of the necessity of establishing liaison with the supreme inter-Allied staff. The debate was long. The King yielded to the

ministers' reasons. He suggested that the contact be established by our military attaché in Paris. Instructions were immediately drawn up by the Minister of National Defense, charging General Delvoie with seeing General Gamelin and organizing an exchange of information as well as the preparation of military collaboration, in the event that Belgium should be led to appeal to the guarantee of the Allies. A few days later we had knowledge of the essentials of their interventions: occupation, to the right of the Belgian divisions, of a part of the K.W. position, the time necessary for taking up that position, the routes of communication which the armies would follow, etc. Provision was made for the designation of Belgian liaison officers to lend their assistance to the Franco-British as soon as they had entered Belgian territory. This communication was followed, by the same route, by several others, until March and April 1940, at which time the information in question was again confirmed; so that when the Allied armies entered Belgium, it was according to arrangements fixed in advance and by common agreement."

In reality, Pierlot had merely pushed open an already open door. The King of the Belgians had only very limited confidence in his ministers. He would have preferred not to have to inform them of his secret dealings with Gamelin. The latter likewise--it is rather amusing to observe after what happened on May 28, 1940--wanted to deal only with Léopold III in person and without the knowledge of his ministers, whom he distrusted, Spaak in particular, whom he did not forgive for having declared to the French ambassador Bargeton in May 1938: "We have just carried out maneuvers on the French frontier to show that if you enter our country to support the Czechs, you will meet the Belgian army!"

Thus the King, his gray eminence General Van Overstraeten, and the generalissimo Gamelin decided to have, over and above the military attachés of the two countries and without "going through the ministry channel,"1 a secret liaison agent in Brussels, the French lieutenant-colonel Hautcoeur, Gamelin's personal emissary to Léopold III and his military adviser.

Throughout the autumn of 1939, the "suggestions"--it is Gamelin who humorously puts the word in quotation marks in his notes!--followed one another either through Hautcoeur or through diplomatic channels.

Gamelin showed himself satisfied with the way in which the Belgians executed his instructions. In his report on the meeting of the French commanders-in-chief of November 25, 1939, one reads: "General Gamelin explains that the Belgians, in accordance with their promises, have begun work on the part of the position envisaged, Namur-Meuse."

"Of course," writes General Gamelin (Servir, vol. I, p. 87), "I kept President Daladier and the British military authorities informed of these unofficial and secret conversations. The Belgians refused any signed agreement, for fear that it might become known to the Germans and serve them as a pretext for invading their country. But I never ceased sending written notes to their General Staff and to the King: I possess the complete collection of them. And the Belgians always made known to me their assent to my proposals. I consider today, in revealing it, that I am betraying no professional secret."

In volume III of the same work (p. 147), Gamelin recalls once again that if the Belgians took great care to "reply verbally," it was from "legal scruple," "for fear that a document might fall into the hands of the Germans."

Obviously, the game was dangerous. Such negotiations fitted rather poorly with a policy of real neutrality. What would the Allies have said if the reverse had occurred, if Léopold III had secretly negotiated with the Wehrmacht High Command, had provided with it "for the designation of Belgian

liaison officers to lend their assistance to the Germans as soon as they had entered Belgian territory," and had camouflaged in Brussels a Prussian lieutenant-colonel as von Brauchitsch's personal representative to the Sovereign and his General Staff?

Those military contacts with the Allies, if one considered cunning the first law of politics, should in any case have been surrounded by total secrecy.

Unfortunately for Léopold III, the secrecy was neither total nor even partial. German espionage in France was astonishingly perfect.2 From September 1939 to May 1940, Hitler in fact knew the essentials--and often the details--of everything being plotted among his adversaries.

Democracy is the reign of chatterers. The need to handle everything in numerous committees, where soldiers and civilians clash at every turn, inevitably produces indiscretions. Moreover, there were not only indiscreet men at the head of the French services, political and military; there were accredited informers. Without them, Hitler would never have known so exactly and so promptly what was being decided among the Allies, whether it concerned their expedition to Norway or the dealings with the Belgians and, incidentally, with the Dutch.

1 Gamelin, Servir, vol. III, p. 147. 2 "The Germans," Gamelin relates (Servir, vol. I, p. 97), "were unfortunately very well informed about us, for our secrets were, in many respects, permeable to their espionage."

Facts are facts. From the end of September 1939, Hitler was aware--he told me so himself in 1944--of the decision of the Supreme Allied Council "to enter secretly into relations with the Belgian government." The conclusion of the "conventions" of November 1939--"At the beginning of November, we had reached an agreement with the Belgian General Staff..."--was known the same week by the German espionage services in France and immediately transmitted to Berlin. Hitler, Goering, and Ribbentrop affirmed it to me, each separately, in 1944 and 1945. As early as November 23, 1939, during a meeting at the Reich Chancellery, Hitler mentioned these revelations before his army commanders. The material proof of this monumental "leak" was found after the war. Document 789 P.S. of the Nuremberg archives contains the undisputed minutes of the statements made that day by the Führer to his generals: "Belgian neutrality, in fact, does not exist," he proclaimed. "The Belgians have fortified themselves only against Germany, and I have proof that they have a secret agreement with the Franco-English."

Without these disastrous indiscretions of the French General Staff and members of the French Council of Ministers, the maneuver of the King of the Belgians might have produced some useful results, making it possible, notably, to combine with "possible" allies a rapid reply in the event of aggression from the east. Léopold III probably wanted nothing more. He was not seeking to bind himself secretly to one of the belligerents in order to open to him, without rhyme or reason, the road through his country. He wanted to cover himself, nothing more. But being neutral, affirming it, proclaiming it, he should either have covered himself on both sides--at least appeared to do so!--or not have covered himself at all. But from the moment when, spurred on by public opinion, itself turned upside down by a hysterical press, he decided to weaken on one side, it was essential that this perilous maneuver remain absolutely unknown to the Germans.

It did not. Not even for a week. Already in November 1939 Hitler could have taken Belgium by the throat by crying out that it had not remained neutral despite its solemn engagements. Hitler preferred for the moment to keep quiet, except before his generals assembled at the Chancellery, but from that

moment he silently prepared his reply. It nearly broke out already in January 1940.

That month was decisive in the evolution of Léopold III. In mid-January 1940, Belgium came within a finger's breadth of entering the war against the Reich. All that was lacking was an English "yes," which was--as always--a "yes-no," for the war to have rolled then over our territory.

The adventure almost belongs to vaudeville. The King had been alerted since the end of December 1939. Not that he had fears about the secrecy of his contacts with Gamelin. He would have fallen backward onto the soft carpets of his Laeken salons if he had learned that, as early as November 23, 1939, Hitler had informed his generals of the "conventions" established between the French generalissimo and himself a few days earlier.

The King was on alert simply because of Ciano's repeated "warnings": "Let Belgium be on guard; it could be attacked on January 15 or shortly afterward."

Ciano had spoken accurately. Informed of the Allied maneuvers aimed at using the Belgian battlefield, Hitler, after many hesitations--he still hoped not to have to fight in the West--had decided to anticipate events. A plan of attack in the West had been improvised in a few weeks. The German offensive was to be launched on January 17, 1940, exactly.

1 After the Belgian capitulation, the Führer had an easy time reminding Léopold III of those secret maneuvers. At Berchtesgaden first, on November 19, 1940, he declared to the Sovereign: "The Belgian government also has its share of responsibility. I can have documents published which prove it clearly. The Belgian government had a quite special conception of neutrality. Until May 10, it did everything to prepare war against us, at the side of France and England." (Report drawn up by the King.) And this, still more violent: "Before your people and before history, the Belgian government alone bears the entire responsibility for having imposed upon Belgium the bloodshed and sacrifices of this war." (Letter from Hitler to Léopold III, February 15, 1943.) Texts too harsh--the Belgian government, and the King no more than it, never directly wanted war--but which nevertheless correspond, in part, to facts, alas undeniable, because of the frivolity--not to say more--of certain collaborators of generalissimo Gamelin and of the French prime minister Daladier.

A week earlier, on January 10, a German Messerschmitt came down from the sky on Belgian territory, near Mechelen-sur-Meuse in Limburg. An astounding landing, for the major carried by the aircraft had on him part of the disposition for the German attack in Belgium and, notably, the orders concerning the conquest of the city of Ghent, which was to be invested by surprise by means of an airborne division.

It was scarcely believable, so unusual were the circumstances of the capture of this plan. A trap could not have been prepared differently. But the King, unlike his ministers, believed the seized documents, having been warned for weeks by Mussolini and Ciano. He alerted Gamelin as soon as the German texts were in his possession: the secret liaison agent of the Allied generalissimo, Colonel Hautcoeur, received from General Van Overstraeten, on the day after the capture, that is, on January 11, 1940, an urgent packet for his chief. This packet contained, in extenso, translated into French, the table of seized information.

Two days later--on the 13th--a new alarm; the military attaché of the Belgian embassy in Berlin, Lieutenant General Goethals, rushed at full speed to Brussels. According to him, extraordinary agitation shook the ruling circles of the Reich. In fact, the landing of the German aircraft at Mechelen, with the plans for their offensive, had terrified the heads of the Wehrmacht. Fearing that they had been

discovered and anticipated, certain advisers of the Führer proposed to precipitate the operation. The manifest signs of an imminent offensive in the West were observed.

War could break out from one hour to the next. In the middle of the night, the King decided to have Gamelin alerted. At one-thirty in the morning, the Belgian general Delvoie brought to Gamelin's command post at Vincennes the following message: "Inform the French generalissimo with the utmost urgency that the attack is almost certain today, January 14."

In the middle of the night also, the British military attaché was summoned to the Palace: "The attack is expected at dawn," he was told.

The King was on hot coals. On January 10, after the famous landing, he had not felt that his anxieties were shared by his ministers. At the château he had one of his most intimate English friends, the United Kingdom government's emissary to him, Admiral Keyes. The admiral urged him to act. Suddenly Léopold III decided to use Admiral Keyes--without the knowledge of the too-skeptical Belgian ministers--to make a preventive appeal to the British government and the Allied military forces. At dawn on the 14th, a Keyes message, the substance of which was in the King's own hand, was sent.

But the appeal was conditional. Before any entry of Anglo-French troops, the King wished to receive formal guarantees concerning the maintenance of the integrity of Belgian territory and of its colonial empire after the war.

"At 3:50 p.m.," Gamelin relates in Servir, "President Daladier telephones me. He has been informed by Mr. Neville Chamberlain that Admiral Keyes, presently in Brussels, has seen the King. The latter declares himself ready to call us in. He asks, however, to know whether France and England would undertake to guarantee at the peace treaty the frontiers of Belgium and of the Congo."

It was wisdom itself. And it was honesty itself. If Belgium threw itself into the fight beside the Allies, the minimum was, all the same, that its property not be clipped along the way.1 On the French side there was at once complete agreement on this point. "General Gamelin," notes his liaison officer Colonel Minart in his book P.C. Vincennes, vol. I, p. 126, "is invited by Mr. Daladier to make known his feeling on the situation. The question is notably to know whether the advantages we could derive from the entry of our troops into Belgian territory before the arrival of German troops justify granting the guarantees requested. The position of the Commander-in-Chief of the land forces is clear. In his opinion, one must jump at the opportunity; that is to say, answer the Belgian appeal."

Considering the negotiation from then on as settled, and not wishing to lose a minute, the French High Command set its divisions in motion all along the northern frontier.

For King Léopold, the matter was equally so clear that--still without the knowledge of his ministers!--at the same time as he had his appeal transmitted by Admiral Keyes, he had ordered, through his General Staff, the obstacles on the French frontier to be raised and Allied troops to be allowed to enter if they presented themselves. For thirty hours these orders were to remain valid. For thirty hours--until January 15 at 11:30 a.m.--if Gamelin, if Daladier, had wanted, they could have pushed their divisions into Belgium as if on a stroll.

"On January 13," related former Belgian prime minister Pierlot in Le Soir of July 9, 1947, "in the evening, a conference is held in the office of the Chief of the General Staff, General van den Bergen. It is decided there to have the barricades closing the roads at the southern frontier removed. During the

first night--therefore in the first hours of the 14th--the order is sent in clear to the posts on the southern frontier to let Allied troops enter if they present themselves. These decisions are taken in the presence and with the agreement of General Van Overstraeten, who attends this conference. The government is neither consulted nor informed."1 But Gamelin's troops tramped in the deep snow all along the frontier, still waiting for definitive confirmation. The whole day of the 14th, then the night of the 14th to the 15th, passed in Siberian cold, without any notification.

The notification did not come because the English guarantee concerning the integrity of Belgian territory--national and colonial--had not yet arrived.

Quite obviously, the government of the United Kingdom was balking: it would have preferred to enter Belgium by means of pressure rather than promises. General Ironside, Chief of the British Imperial General Staff, telegraphed coldly to Generalissimo Gamelin on January 14 at 1:01 p.m.: "It seems intolerable to me that we cannot have precise conversations with the Belgians on military subjects. I am resolved to support with all my forces a strong pressure which you would exert upon the Belgian Grand General Staff in order to achieve these conversations." (J. Minart, P.C. Vincennes, vol. I, p. 125.)

But there was no need to "achieve" conversations: the frontier was open, the barricades were removed, the order to allow Allied troops to enter Belgium had been sent since early morning. It was simply a matter of replying clearly that Belgium's and the Congo's territory would be maintained after the fight. It was simple. But for twenty-four hours England hesitated to pronounce. Finally it gave a sibylline answer, disappointing in the highest degree, which was to annul the planned operation: "On the morning of May 15," writes Gamelin in Servir (vol. III, p. 158), "we were informed by the Quai d'Orsay that the British government had not received the King's requests without reservations. No doubt from legal scruples, it believed it should give the guarantees requested only to the fullest extent possible."

Colonel Minart, his deputy, notes gloomily, under the date of January 15, in his P.C. Vincennes (vol. I, pp. 131-132):

"The English reply has neither the clarity nor the brevity of the French reply. It seems to reflect scruples of a legal order which may be interpreted either as a desire not to bind the future too much, or even as a doubt about the very course of the war and the success of Allied arms... The Quai d'Orsay will sense the nuance. When he has knowledge of the British text, M. Corbin will, on his own initiative, have regret expressed to the Foreign Office that the very wording of the Belgian requests was not simply adopted."

If the Belgian requests were not adopted, it was because Great Britain had long had ulterior motives concerning the Congo. We now know, following the publication of archives by the Allies, that on November 19, 1937, for example, the English minister Halifax had come to the Obersalzberg to treat with Hitler the question of the Reich's former colonies.

Following this interview, His Britannic Majesty's ambassador in Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson, was charged with delivering--on March 3, 1938--to the Chancellor of the Reich a written proposal for settlement.1 Before delivering this official text to the Führer, the ambassador had stressed its "confidential character." "Its contents," he declared, "will be communicated neither to the French, nor still less to the Belgians, the Portuguese, or the Italians."

1 At 3:30 in the morning, on January 14, the order to remove the military obstacles on the French

frontier had already been executed, as testified by the following telegram from the English G.H.Q. to General Swaine, head of the British mission to General Georges, commander-in-chief of the North-East Front: "The military attaché, in crossing the frontier, saw, near Tournai, that the Belgians had withdrawn the barriers."

This proposal aimed quite bluntly at obtaining the Reich's abandonment of its claims to its colonial empire, of which Great Britain had awarded herself the best part, and at compensating that renunciation by assigning Germany a zone of influence over a "part of Africa," "a territory roughly equal to the Congo basin," said the note handed over by Sir Neville Henderson. "In the region of Africa in question, a new division of the colonies would be carried out. In this new division, Germany would not be forgotten and would have under its sovereignty a colonial territory."

The official report of this interview establishes beyond any possible doubt that the English offer concerned very exactly the Belgian Congo and Angola. It was therefore at the expense of Belgium and Portugal that the Reich's influence in Africa would have been restored.

Hitler had not bitten at this bait. "Perhaps," he had retorted, not without malice, to the English ambassador, "Belgium and Portugal would not at all agree!" He had added: "Germany does not want the settlement of the colonial question to be made to the detriment of other countries." Very sensibly, he made this quite simple counterproposal: "Why, instead of creating a new complicated system, do you not wish to settle the colonial question in the most natural way, by returning to Germany her former colonies?"

England certainly had not forgotten in 1940 her secret offers of 1938, "a solution which, in the opinion of the British government, would present many advantages," a modest formula that Hitler could read at the head of the note handed to him by Sir Neville Henderson.

No doubt, two years later, Great Britain--one of whose most remarkable qualities is, along with patience, continuity in ideas--was still envisaging the possibility, with a view to a reconciliation with Germany, of a gesture on the colonial plane whose costs other nations would bear. And there, quite probably, is the explanation for the surprising reservations expressed by the British on January 14, 1940.

What was King Léopold III to do before such a "reservation" by the English? Launch himself preventively into a war against the Reich when one of his two future allies did not even agree to promise that Belgium would keep her old frontiers and--this was above all the King's fear--her colonial empire? Belgium risked everything; it sought no profit. It was at least entitled to ask... not to lose. "The Belgian Sovereign," concludes Colonel Minart (P.C. Vincennes, vol. II, p. 137), "did not find in the English reply the assurances on which he could have relied to obtain the adherence of his government to his own step. British skepticism unquestionably reacted upon the royal will."

Léopold III judged that, if such military risks had to be run without even receiving a minimum guarantee, it was just as well to wait and see. One chance remained to be run: that the German aircraft plan was a trap, or that, revealed by accident, it would not be carried out.

Léopold III had offered his collaboration. The Belgian frontier had been open to Allied troops for thirty hours. It would have been enough for the English to commit themselves clearly, as the French had done, and Belgium would have been at their disposal for the rush toward the East. The English slipping away, the King, in turn--that was normal--slipped away. On the 15th, at the end of the morning, the

order to let the Allied armies enter was annulled; Gamelin's troops had nothing left to do but return, frozen, to their starting positions.

This adventure was to have unforeseen, profound repercussions of the highest gravity.

It poisoned the King's relations with his government. After at first categorically denying before his ministers, alerted by a question from Daladier to the Belgian ambassador in Paris,1 that he had launched an appeal to the Allies, the King had indeed had to, somewhat embarrassedly, acknowledge the fact later in a tête-à-tête with Spaak.2 As for the incident of the orders to remove the barricades at the French frontier and allow Allied troops to enter--"the Government is neither consulted nor informed..."--when, a few days later, the said Pierlot government was informed of these capital facts by "local information," the King, having to extricate himself from a difficult position, simply and purely made the man who had dictated the measures on his order bear the responsibility: the Chief of Staff, General van den Bergen. Léopold III proposed, without further ceremony, that the latter be dismissed at once. Which was done. With Corneille-like dignity, General van den Bergen accepted, lips closed, to be thus sacked for "reasons of state."

The unease nevertheless remained. It had deep roots. May 10, 1940, was to lay them bare forever.

Aside from these internal repercussions, there were external repercussions. The Germans, to whom the discovery of their plan, seized from the famous aircraft, might have caused the greatest harm, on the contrary derived the greatest advantage from it. For the French army, by coming out en masse from its lairs only to go back into them two days later, had revealed its entire disposition for setting in motion. Hitler, after having cancelled the offensive of January 17, was able to make great use, with a view to May 10, of the lessons thus acquired.

The Allies, for their part, bore a grudge against Léopold III for this failure--quite unjustly. The English had only themselves to blame. The King of the Belgians had duties only toward the Belgian people: believing them in danger, he had declared himself ready to call upon the Allies, but he was obliged to annul his offer when he learned of the chilling "reservations" made by the British.

Annoyed for this reason as well, further hurt by the clandestine character of the negotiations conducted between the King and the Allies, and fearing, after all this commotion on the French frontier, a violent backlash from the German side, the Pierlot government tried to clear itself in Berlin by a stiffer position in the south: "The French High Command," writes Colonel Minart, "was officially informed that if one of our soldiers entered Belgium, he would immediately be considered an enemy."

Such was the situation at the end of January 1940. King Léopold felt himself burned. He saw that the threat of war was drawing closer to his country. On the side of the Allies, he had compromised himself in perilous negotiations since the beginning of November 1939. On January 14, 1940, he had been within a millimeter of intervention; he had had to retreat at the last minute, obtaining as final result only an explosion of ill humor on the part of the "called-in" who, after thirty hours, had become the "turned-away."

The English "reservations" had made him lose faith. This war, he saw more and more clearly, could be for his people and his country only a lamentable affair.

Always the great question returned to his mind and heart: "How to remain outside this cursed brawl?"

1 "Surprised," related Prime Minister Pierlot in Le Soir of July 9, 1947, "not to receive the agreement he expected, M. Daladier, during the day of the 15th, questioned the Belgian ambassador, M. Le Tellier, and told him that the troops were in place to enter our territory. The ambassador knows nothing. He telegraphs M. Spaak, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is surprised by this communication, of which he does not know the cause. He informs the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defense. All three are received by the King and inform him of the Ambassador's communication. This interview brings no clarification." 2 "Shortly afterward," Pierlot continues in his account, "the King receives M. Spaak and informs him, with some annoyance, of the initiative he had taken in London. The Minister of Foreign Affairs respectfully makes the representations that are called for. Anxious about the consequences of his step, he asks the Minister to arrange this affair."

Another, complementary question gradually insinuated itself: "If, despite everything, war breaks out in the West, how can it be made the least bloody possible for my people?"

A subsidiary question, a question which, from month to month, was to submerge the principal question more and more each day and finally fix the King's true line of conduct until the capitulation of May 28, 1940.

The Allies, he knew, wished to bring the war into Belgium so as not to have it at home. Then why could he, King of the Belgians, not reason in the same way about Belgium, and desire that the war be fought off his soil rather than on his soil? If a Gamelin found it highly desirable for fighting to take place in Belgian Brabant or Belgian Condroz in order to spare the "rich French provinces" of the North, why could a Léopold III not find it highly preferable that the fighting take place in Picardy or Champagne rather than in the "rich provinces" of Belgium?

Was not Belgium's last plank of relative salvation, in the event of war, a clash between the belligerents on their respective territories, as far as possible south of Belgian territory?

Léopold III did not wish to neglect this last possibility. Discreetly, certain of his emissaries made it half-understood, in February and March 1940, that instead of rushing in mass through Belgium, the Wehrmacht should rather seek the encounter toward the south, without undertaking exhausting turning movements through Belgian territory. Belgium did not want war for the sake of war. It would confine itself to the sole defense of its national soil. What happened south of its territory did not interest it.

These suggestions--however selfish they were--were perfectly defensible. Politics is not philanthropy for the benefit of quarrelsome foreigners. Belgium first had to think of itself, exactly as the others first thought of themselves.

But in March 1940, these discreet counsels came too late to impress Hitler any longer. Indeed, his plan for a break-through at the Meuse was already decided and fixed. And, moreover, Hitler was not ready to forgive Léopold III and his government for their secret links of the autumn of 1939 with Gamelin and his General Staff. The Führer concluded simply from these whispered counsels that if the Belgians, after all their chatter with the Allies, had reached the point, in March 1940, of desiring that the latter receive the shock of the Wehrmacht as far as possible south of Luxembourg, it was because they scarcely believed in the military success of the French and British enterprises.

The affair could have remained there. Unfortunately, once again there were indiscretions. The Allied High Command and the French government were informed of these specious counsels by a report from Commandant Serre, head of the Second Bureau in Billotte's army group, transmitted by Colonel

Schoesser, head of the French intelligence service. This report contained the following "confidences" from "the entourage of M. Devèze, former Minister of War, and of M. Spaak": "We urgently ask you to warn your chiefs that King Léopold and his present Chief of Staff intend not to oppose serious resistance to the Germans, for the King wants, at all costs, to avoid the destruction of Belgian cities. After a short resistance on the line of fortifications, the Belgian army will withdraw to the Antwerp-Brussels line and let the German army flow southward so that it crosses Belgium without stopping there. In this way, the battle will at once be carried into France."

The King was unlucky. As with the negotiations with Gamelin, such a tactic had value only if it remained camouflaged.

On both sides, the King had lost the game: on the German side he was regarded as an accomplice of the Allied General Staff, with which he had secretly entered into contact as early as November 1939 while publicly declaring himself neutral; on the Allied side he was now regarded as a difficult neighbor, very little manageable, even less and less reliable.

Now events were becoming such that, spurred by their public opinion, the two Western democracies were driven to make a dramatic move.

They had sought, and were seeking more and more, to divert the war toward other territories--always the protection of the "rich provinces."

The failure had been complete in Poland in 1939. The winter of 1939-1940 had been only stagnation. French and English leaders came to the conclusion that only war carried into Scandinavia, the Balkans, and above all Belgium would give sufficient moral satisfaction to their exasperated public. Until then the Allies had measured their words, wrapped up their proposals when they spoke of a "preventive" entry into Belgium. Once the great "hope" of January 14, 1940, had been dissipated by the flop we know, the French General Staff rallied to the system of pure and simple provocation, intended to oblige the Germans to enter Belgium, since the Belgians--closing their southern frontier to the Allies--did not allow them to run across their soil toward Hitler's divisions.

I confess that it took me a long time to believe that the French General Staff could coolly have imagined such a tactic. The Reich had been so vituperated in May 1940 over the German assault through innocent Belgium that I could not imagine a Machiavellianism going so far as officially deciding to set everything in motion in order to corner Germany into carrying out that very invasion. But the French documents published since then have convinced those who refused to believe in such duplicity. In the Note on the Conduct of the War of March 16, 1940, signed by Gamelin himself and handed by him to the Daladier government, the French High Command demanded, without detours, a policy of blockade such that it would trigger the German invasion of Belgium. The first point of the note says literally: "We must tighten the blockade in order to remove from the enemy every interest in sparing Holland and Belgium. The goal is: to incite Germany to force matters and to invade the Low Countries and Belgium."

This incredible text is reproduced by Reynaud himself in volume II, page 20, of his work La France a sauvé l'Europe. Gamelin never disputed the authenticity of this "unfortunate phrase."

The day before, March 15, at the meeting of the French commanders-in-chief, the same policy of provocation had been demanded. One reads in the report of that meeting (Servir, vol. III, p. 215): "It is possible that a strengthened blockade of Germany and the neutrals will push Germany to attack

Belgium and Holland, which it will no longer have to spare.

"It therefore seems that the first weapon of which we must make full use remains the blockade."

The Supreme Allied Council, meeting on March 28, 1940, went still further. Considering an agreement--still possible--between Holland and Germany, it decided that such a Dutch-German arrangement "would give the Allies the right to take all measures of reprisal they judged useful." Belgium would have to participate immediately in these "measures of reprisal" against its neighbor; otherwise it would be invaded by the Allies without further ceremony. General Gamelin explained the operation quite bluntly in these terms (Note 398 C.A.B./DN to the Minister of National Defense and War): "It is quite obvious that, if Belgium agrees to let us pass and decides to enter the war at our side, we shall have nothing to change in the dispositions planned for our entry onto its territory, and we shall benefit from the addition of twenty supplementary divisions destined to hold an important part of the front.

"If it refuses, we may have before us a hostile Belgium. In any case, if it preserves a passive attitude, the problem of our push forward on the northern front is profoundly modified. It will no longer be a sort of concentration of our forces behind the cover constituted by the Belgian army, a cover which we would support to the fullest extent possible. It will be a forward march in battle, with the necessity of being ready to fight the battle at any moment, in conditions impossible to foresee in advance and without the assistance of the Belgian army."1 The Allies had also decided to violate the neutrality of Norway and Sweden in order to cut "the iron route" and divert the war toward the north. Hitler, having beaten them to it there as well and having landed forty-eight hours before them, left only the solution of the Belgian battlefield. It was demanded with still greater firmness on April 9, 1940, at the War Committee, meeting at the Élysée under the presidency of M. Albert Lebrun, President of the French Republic.

German White Book No. 6 published (document 35) the historical report of that meeting, found in June 1940 in an archive train abandoned by the French General Staff in the station at La Charité-sur-Loire. One reads there: "Admiral Darlan proposes: 1. Enter Belgium. 2. Proceed with the launching of river mines. 3. Carry out local attacks on the north-east front. The President of the Council asks General Gamelin's opinion on these proposals.

"General Gamelin declares himself in favor of action in Belgium. The President of the Council having observed to him that the enemy has a double superiority over us in aviation and in effectives, General Gamelin confirms his affirmative answer and General Georges associates himself with it.

"The Minister of National Defense and War gives an entirely favorable opinion on the operation."

Reynaud, who was then President of the Council, did not try in his Memoirs to conceal the offensive character of the proposed operation: "The question of the entry of Allied troops into Belgium," he writes (vol. II, p. 44), "was put to the War Committee held on April 9, 1940, at the Élysée.

"What Admiral Darlan was asking was that we take the initiative of going into Belgium with, naturally, the certainty of coming up against the German army."

That very afternoon, Reynaud submitted the plan to the Supreme Allied Council, meeting in London: "Churchill," Reynaud writes, "again asks that it be decided that the operation in Belgium would be carried out by authority if Holland were invaded. I did not oppose it."

But King Léopold was stubborn. It was he who opposed it. Gamelin, immediately after these decisions, from the night of April 10 to 11, 1940, had the first military pressures applied at the Belgian frontier. He ordered alert measures No. 1 and No. 2. Then he sent Colonel Hautcoeur to the military adviser of King Léopold, General Van Overstraeten, in order to obtain an "appeal" by amicable means.2 At the same time, the ambassadors of England and France received orders to make an immediate démarche to the government of Léopold III.3 At Vincennes, the Belgian military attaché was summoned at 10:30 a.m. to be "lectured" by Gamelin in person. The latter again believed the matter settled.4 Before noon, Daladier, Minister of War, assembled at his home all the star-studded bigwigs--Gamelin, Vuillemin, Georges. "This meeting," writes Colonel Minart, liaison officer of the generalissimo, "once again gave General Gamelin the opportunity to underline with great force the interest we would have in seeing operations begin in Belgium." (P.C. Vincennes, vol. I, p. 113.)

1 Gamelin, Servir, vol. III, pp. 349-350. 2 "Colonel Hautcoeur telephones me that he had been received in the morning by General Van Overstraeten. The latter had initially seemed to understand the situation and the opportunity that was offered, then kept him for lunch. He then went to see the King. It was only very late that Hautcoeur was finally informed that the answer was negative." (Gamelin, Servir, vol. III, p. 330.) 3 "It was decided that pressing representations would be made to the Belgian government so that it would invite the Allied armies to enter its territory." (Churchill, The Gathering Storm, vol. II, p. 213.) 4 Until then, Gamelin had deluded himself wildly about the docility of Léopold III. In a note of March 5, 1940 (No. 554 CAB/FI), he wrote: "The Belgian army is under the authority of the King who, for the moment, has accepted only to conform to my personal directives."

"In conclusion, the General Commander-in-Chief marks his resolution to enter Belgium, emphasizing that no new consideration seems to him capable of modifying a point of view already fixed, moreover, during the alert of January 15, 1940.

"It would be hard to understand," he says, "that our intervention should have the same character whether we act on our own initiative or on appeal." (P.C. Vincennes, vol. I, p. 143.)

In the most cavalier terms possible, Gamelin even indicated how the Belgians would have to be informed: "Without promising anything to the Brussels government, it will be advised urgently that 'everything reasonable will be done to give it satisfaction.'" (P.C. Vincennes, vol. I, p. 143.)

The same day, at the same hour, in Brussels, bellicist packs poured onto the boulevards, acclaiming France and Great Britain. These demonstrations too visibly smelled of blackmail and secret funds. Gamelin's alert measures on the southern frontier were inadmissible. The King answered with a clear refusal and that very evening--another answer!--he had Belgian troops tightened up on the French frontier.

One sees that those who believed that May 10, 1940, was the crowning of a great love had nursed famous illusions. And they still did not know everything. Not obtaining that the Belgian government "call" them in, still dominated by the idea that Germany might--perhaps in agreement with Holland--occupy Holland without touching Belgium, the Allies gave definitive character to their decision, taken at the Supreme Allied Council in London on April 9, to enter Belgium in that case "by authority."

An unheard-of resolution was adopted: to send at once to the embassies of the United Kingdom and France in Brussels two ultimatums to be handed on "J-day" to M. Spaak, Minister of Foreign Affairs of His Majesty the King of the Belgians. This fantastic decision was communicated to the French High

Command by the Supreme Council on April 15, 1940: "It was then," writes General Gamelin, nevertheless rather scandalized (Servir, vol. III, p. 350), "it was then that I learned of the decision our two governments had taken, on April 9, to prepare an ultimatum to Belgium, which would be deposited at our two embassies in Brussels and handed over if the need arose.

"For my part, I considered that this procedure was not fortunate. One sees," adds the generalissimo, "that the British and French governments were fully resolved to enter Belgium and that they were going much further along this road than I."

Thus the situation of Léopold III and his country, on the eve of May 10, 1940, was desperate. On one side, Hitler, perfectly aware of the Allied maneuvers in Belgium since November 1939 and of their ever more imperious will to force the decision there, was resolved to get ahead of his competitors. On the other side, two formal ultimatums were waiting in the safes of the two democratic embassies for the moment to inform Léopold III of the violation of Belgian territory by the Poilus and the Tommies, en route toward Middelburg and Breda, to meet the armies of the Reich.

Thus, with the best will in the world, long before May 10, 1940, King Léopold already found himself sunk up to the neck in the ever-thickening glue in which, politically, he was going to perish.

Through these many incidents, we Rex men had pursued a policy of rectilinear simplicity. During our interviews in the winter of 1939-1940, the King had revealed nothing to me of his associations with the Allies and of the disappointments they had brought him. On the other hand, nothing then allowed one to suppose that Hitler knew, with such extraordinary exactitude, the most secret negotiations of the French government and General Staff with Léopold III.

I had been informed, incidentally, of the orders given on January 14 by the Belgian General Staff to open the frontier to the Franco-English. I had at once expressed to the King my amazement and anxiety. But to me also, the defenestration of General van den Bergen had led me to believe that the King had punished, as soon as he knew of it, this flagrant breach of Belgian neutrality, committed without his knowledge, he affirmed.

So my faith in the King's strict neutrality was strengthened still more.

How could I have doubted it? I discussed with the King himself the principal themes I developed in my daily newspaper to defend Belgian neutrality. He supported me, sustained me with as much sympathy as warmth.

I do not resent him for having let me sink into a dead-end path and even for having pushed me to entangle myself there still more. Politics is not a trade for innocents. In this occurrence as in others, Léopold III acted for the best, in the exclusive interest of the country. If, from October 1939, he had conducted negotiations with the Allies that constituted a clandestine violation of his official policy of neutrality, it was because he wished to preserve for his country the advantages of that neutrality while leaning toward the western side, where he believed--perhaps rather naively--that he was less threatened. If he had almost even ranged himself beside the Allies on January 14, 1940, and resorted to preventive war, it was because impressive warnings and documents had led him to believe in an imminent violation of the eastern Belgian frontier. If he had changed his attitude two days later, it was because England had refused him the precise engagement to which he was absolutely entitled.

His policy aimed, to the end, at trying to gain time and calm too-excited neighbors, all burning to come

to blows on the soil of our country, tragically placed at the crossroads of ambitions and hatreds.

In the final period, Léopold III maneuvered only in hope of a miracle. As long as Belgian peace was alive, hope remained. He wished to defend that hope on all fronts and especially on the front of neutrality, the most thankless, where almost no one agreed any longer to fight.

He pushed me as much as he could to prolong the struggle on that ground, for that idea. I regret nothing, for that struggle to save peace might have succeeded. In any case, it was pure, noble, honest, and wholly disinterested. The King treated us as a sacrificed mission. There is not the shadow of a doubt about that. But someone had to sacrifice himself. Apart from us, who would have done it? We could not save peace. At least we tried everything for it. It is not our fault if, from 1940 to 1945, so much blood flowed, if millions of mothers wept, if millions of graves were opened.

Despite the encouragement the King lavished on me during those dramatic months, I often felt like sending everything to the devil. If we had not been set aflame by a desperate love of our country, we would, from the first weeks of neutrality, have folded our tents and left the entire Belgian field to the bellicist pack.

How many times, when I came home at half past two or three in the morning, worn out, my face and hands smeared with printer's ink, how many times had my wife, revolted by the frenzied hatreds of the bellicist clans, begged me to abandon that impossible fight and let the crowds commit suicide, since they had such a furious desire to do so.

But we had to remain masters of our nerves. Certainly, the chances of maintaining Belgian neutrality diminished every day. As the war continued, it would sooner or later roll over Belgium, since, apart from the distant Balkans and Scandinavia, our territory was the only battlefield where the great belligerents could meet. Were they going to sacrifice or diminish their chances of victory--or survival--for the bright eyes of a handful of Belgians who, moreover, in their immense majority, were clamoring at the top of their voices to be hurled immediately into the struggle?

If, foreseeing the disaster suspended above Europe, one wanted Belgium to escape these horrors, there was only one solution: restore concord abroad before the irreparable was accomplished. That possibility hung by only a thread. But the thread still existed. Everything had to be tried, until the last minute, to maintain islands of peace; one had to continue launching ideas of peace and pushing the belligerent groups toward an agreement which, by saving the continent, would spare our country--threatened from very near, by all sides--the tears and crosses of a new slaughter.

The German campaign in Norway, in April 1940, had made our task as peacemakers still more thankless.

Even the most serious newspapers let themselves be carried away by a whirlwind of madness. One saw the gravest daily in Brussels, La Libre Belgique, publish, in large italics, a roaring description, invented from beginning to end, of the reconquest of Oslo fjord by His Britannic Majesty's landing troops; not a topographical detail was missing: the reconquest had been carried out by the western bank.

All Belgium was submerged under hurricanes of lies. It was no longer even possible to announce in Le Pays réel, under a normal headline, a German victory, rigorously exact, without being immediately reviled in abominable fashion.

Certain bourgeois Rex men, terrified, no longer feeling themselves capable of resisting these slaps, took to their heels, running blindly to humbly inform the newspapers that had used them as a whipping post of their resignation. One even saw a Brussels lawyer, the son of a former Catholic minister, who had published, under a pseudonym, in Le Pays réel numerous articles, excellent moreover, on Belgian neutrality, frightened by the uproar he had unleashed, not only make himself scarce, but publicly disassociate himself from Rex, thus protesting against his own articles.

Humanity is an immense bog into which the toads rush at the first danger. Toads were swarming by the millions in the mire on the evening of May 9, 1940.

Who, however, would have suspected that evening that the last night of Europe's peace had come?

I had finished my work a little earlier than usual in order to take my wife, so often neglected, to the last showing at the Caméo cinema, at eleven o'clock in the evening. We had watched a Greta Garbo film, she being transformed for the occasion into a young Bolshevik girl disembarking on a mission in Paris. Her accomplice was named Léon, like me. Each time that first name was spoken, the crowd turned in my direction, smiling or joking. People amused themselves. I laughed with them. We came out, cheerful, at one in the morning, amid the crowd nudging one another.

Back at home, I lingered for a long time before sleeping, cutting myself a slice of bread and then browsing in my library, according to my old habit.

At five in the morning, suddenly, came the tornado. I went out onto the terrace of my bedroom. Clouds of aircraft glittered in the sky, bombing the region. War was there. The cursed war. After months of stagnation, during which everything had been possible, the cyclone was unleashed.

At half past six in the morning, the bell rang. Two unknown men, in civilian clothes, asked to see me. They asked me to accompany them by car to the Palace of Justice, where the General Administrator of State Security wished to speak with me.

Even then, I thought nothing of it. The fact that I was there, that the Germans had warned me of nothing whatever, clearly proved that I had no link with them. These two civilians carried no warrant of arrest. Moreover, as a deputy--and on May 10, 1940, I was the elected deputy with the greatest number of preference votes in all Belgium--I could not be arrested without a prior vote of the Chambers.

I believed that they had some information to ask of me. In any case, having not the slightest fact with which to reproach myself, why should I have been worried?

Arrived at Place Poelaert, I did not even have the chance to utter a word. I was made to follow a corridor, then, without explanation, I was locked in a narrow cell, like a lion cage. A few hours later, without a warrant of arrest, without the least explanation, I was stuffed into a police van which dropped me at Saint-Gilles prison, where I was quickly placed incommunicado.

What did they want with me? Impossible to know. Forbidden to write. Forbidden to ask anything. Any reaction was vain. I was even refused a lawyer.

Old fanatic Janson had taken his revenge. Without the knowledge of King Léopold, who had left for his grand headquarters, he had nevertheless succeeded, against the civilians, in the famous political maneuver that had failed against the military. From the North Sea to the Ardennes, thousands of

innocents had been ignominiously thrown into the jails of the regime at the same hour as I. For the whole nation, their arrest on the very day of the German invasion would necessarily take on an infamous meaning. They were traitors. There is no smoke without fire, says the proverb.

Well, no, there had been no fire. There had only been a miserable agent of the Lodges named Janson who, relying on nothing,1 without even taking the trouble to respect legal forms, simply by violating the laws and lowering to abjection the ministerial function with which he was invested, had carried out a revolting maneuver intended to soil and dishonor the politicians who obstructed him, when the country at that hour should have been only one single vibrating soul, one single cry of patriotism, and one single gift.

We were going to know frightful months in Belgian and French prisons. A certain number of our male and female companions in sorrow would be massacred like dogs according to the chance of hatreds, without the assassins even knowing what names their victims bore: old people, young girls, priests, brutally and blindly shot and bayoneted. But Janson, when he sent so many innocents in chains before those bestial furies, knew exactly what he was doing.

He was liquidating the opposition. He had calculated correctly. Excited against us for a long time by incessant calumnies, the crowds, led astray at so dramatic a moment, not hearing our indignant protests, would forever believe that there had been, in May 1940, in Belgium, a fifth column in Hitler's service.

In politics, the one who hesitates before nothing wins. Janson had not hesitated. The low blow had been struck. We were on the floor. On the floor for a long time. Some of us forever.

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V

TOUR OF FRANCE AND OF SUFFERING

The anarchy of the arrests of May 10. - My odyssey through nineteen prisons. - Massacre of my twenty-one companions at Abbeville. - Customs of the French police. - The unknown German. - The fatal missal. -- Story of my double corpse. - Still imprisoned despite the armistice. - My hearse. - Le Vernet. - Lunch with Otto Abetz. - The "enemy wagons."

The imprisonment of thousands of so-called "suspects" on May 10, 1940, had been carried out in total incoherence. This human herd had been arrested wholesale, without reasons, solely because names had been entered in the political file drawn up in the tohu-bohu of the last weeks of neutrality, according to the instructions of Janson and of his bully, the auditor general Ganshof van der Meersch, himself a Jansonite, a cutthroat, an insatiable place-seeker, a pirate, greedy for money, a petty tyrant ready for every dirty trick capable of satisfying his cupidity or his ambition.

At Liège, in Limburg, in Luxembourg, the disorganization of the telephone services and the speed of the Wehrmacht rush had prevented the massive plan of persecution from being carried out.

Elsewhere, everything had been incomprehensible: in certain towns, not one arrest; in lost villages, eighty arrests! A grievously mutilated veteran of the 1914-1918 war such as the former Rexist deputy

of the Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse, Arthur Caignet, an ardent Francophile, had been dragged like a bandit to the prison of Charleroi, despite his dozens of glorious wounds and his almost total disability! He would never recover from this imprisonment and would die during the war itself, a hero of the front finished off by the politicians of his own country.

Everywhere, the hunt had depended on the degree of hatred, servility, and electoral flair of the local minions of Ganshof and Janson.

Once these thousands of innocents had been shoved into cells, the same anarchy presided over a certain number of releases. Just as people had been arrested without reasons, they were released without reasons. It was enough to have powerful or dangerous friends who would go and make a scene in a minister's office and, with one telephone call, a release was ordered. It was arbitrariness in all its amplitude.

A striking case was that of Staf de Clerq, leader of the Vlaamsch Nationalist Verbond (V.N.V.).

He had gone to Berlin in 1939. In anti-Flemish circles he was considered the successor of the Activists of the 1914-1918 war. At the hour when all the crooks and murderers of Saint-Gilles prison met again in the exercise yard for the gymnastics lesson, I was not more astonished than reason required, on the second day of the war, to perceive the florid complexion, the river-like beard, and the rounded belly of excellent Staf. Sport was not his specialty. He had tried in vain to manage one or two bends. It would not do. The paunch blocked the way.

I was not to see Staf de Clerq again before August 1940; that very day he was released. Why him, a big fish? Why not the others? Two V.N.V. senators had gone to make a scandal at Janson's office. Janson had immediately deflated, although the Flemish nationalist leader had been caught in the act of carrying a revolver at the time of his arrest. An hour after the uproar made by the two senators, Staf de Clerq, free and cheerful, was watering his gullet on a terrace of the Place de Brouckère, having understood nothing of either his imprisonment or his release.

The director of the Belgian weekly Cassandre, Paul Colin, who after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles had more or less wished for German revenge, was also released after twenty-four hours, on the simple intervention of one of his parliamentary friends, Count Charles-Albert d'Aspremont-Lynden.

By these two examples one may judge the frivolity with which the file-makers of the Janson gang had acted: twelve thousand arrest warrants had been issued which rested on nothing, and which a simple political approach could immediately have annulled.

Rex was a movement of young men, an uncompromising movement which did not flirt with its adversaries in the corridors of the Regime. None of our parliamentarians could have usefully protested my arrest to a Janson or a Pierlot. Most of our comrades, mobilized and in the midst of battle, did not even know that I had become the quarry of our political adversaries.

What my Calvary was, and that of my companions, is known. I recounted my tragic adventure in my book La Guerre en Prison. After three days, bound with ropes like a beast, surrounded by soldiers who had received the order to fire on me at the first movement, I was taken in a butcher's van to the prison of Bruges. On May 15, 1940, the infamy was committed of delivering me to a foreign police force, to the French police, at Dunkirk. I was dragged through nineteen successive prisons, a millimeter from death each day, my jaw smashed by blows from clogs and enormous prison keys, ten teeth broken, my

body battered during night beatings, left in that state without food and without drink in the prison of Caen for seventy hours, then forced to drink the urine of my guards, displayed totally naked, almost every day, before sadistic hordes, put in irons, feet and hands chained, at Nantes, at Angers, then in the underground cells of the fortress of Angoulême, at the insane asylum of Niort, and elsewhere.

I shall not return to that here. Others knew a fate still more dreadful. I had in my truck twenty-one companions in misery, all civilians arrested like me, completely blindly, when the Belgian gendarmes had brought me from Bruges to Dunkirk and handed me over to the French police hounds. These men wanted to assassinate me the same day; after two hours of terror, they took me away, blindfolded, to shoot me. It was only an ignoble sham. They preferred first to make me endure, at their "Cheka" in Lille, unspeakable torments, imagining that I knew Hitler's whole campaign plan and that, at the end of my suffering, I would reveal it! It was this imbecile fanaticism of my torturers that saved my life.

My twenty-one companions, for their part, had been taken farther on. At the prison of Béthune, men, women, young girls, priests, were made completely naked in one another's presence. They were beaten to such a point that a poor priest from Bruges had an eye forced out of its socket. For three days the unfortunate man held that slimy eye against his cheek.

Finally, French officers and soldiers massacred them near the bandstand of the main square of Abbeville, on the Somme, in broad noon daylight, on May 21, 1940. The women went the same way as the others. In our truck there had been a grandmother, her daughter, and her granddaughter, originally from Bruges. All three were shot down. The grandmother was murdered with cold steel: she received about thirty bayonet thrusts in the breasts before dying.

French policemen, French courts-martial, could not have said more against me than the Jansons, Ganshofs, and other lodge-men.

Four months earlier, they let me boulevard about Paris in peace. They were delivering me to them? Good. They took me to Lille, where I was immediately charged with espionage, so as to have the chance to shoot me without delay and without explanations.

I was first entrusted to the boxers on duty, in the Rue de Solferino. Never in my life have I seen anything so horrible: old men totally stripped, their skin greened by blows and by anguish, faces of tortured men, bruised, swollen like enormous red cabbages, fingers trampled and crushed. All night the dreadful screams of the tortured filled the building: bodies were hurled like sacks from the top of the stairwell; poor wretches came back spitting floods of blood and shattered teeth.

Since Dunkirk, my wrists had been clamped in short chrome-steel handcuffs, tightened to the maximum, to such a point that after two days of torture they had to be broken to free the flesh, swollen to ten times its size and completely purplish.

Opposite me was a man of mature age who, under the blows, had taken on the appearance of a veritable monster. In La Guerre en Prison I described his enormous bruised and apoplectic head, with blackened, bulging eyes, the color of old medlars. He had terrified me, but I had said no more about it in my memoirs, not knowing then who he was. For two days we had lived face to face, surrounded by guards who watched us. I had had no reaction, having never seen this man.

Now this prisoner had deliberately been placed before me, night and day. He was, as I was to learn only a year later, an important Nazi personality, head of the German National Socialist party in Belgium. His

name was Schültze. They expected me to show surprise at seeing him again and to make him a sign. To the great astonishment of my torturers, I said nothing, for the excellent reason that I had absolutely no idea who this vis-à-vis was.

This feature will show, once again, to what extent Rex's relations with the Germans, before May 10, 1940, were nil. Otherwise, I would have known this No. 1 personage of the Reich in my country. I had already written my La Guerre en Prison when one day I happened by chance to run into this Schültze in Brussels and recognized in him, with stupefaction, my crimson companion from the beating at Lille. Only then did I understand what trap my torturers had set for me.

I had escaped it in the most natural way in the world, having had — I have said and repeated it — no contact with any German, either in the Reich or outside the Reich, knowing nothing of this poor fat Schültze in particular, as I knew nothing of the Germans of Belgium in general.

The French investigating magistrate, who burned to have me shot, was vexed by this failure.

For, apart from the decisive results he hoped to obtain from this confrontation, he had nothing, strictly nothing, to charge against me. He had me brought to the citadel of Lille alone, with my guards, in a gigantic fifty-seat bus. I quickly became acquainted with my file. It contained, in all and for all, my missal and two insane cuttings from two Belgian newspapers: La Dernière Heure, whose name was particularly comforting in the circumstances, and a little provincial socialist-Masonic rag entitled Journal de Charleroi.

These two clippings, no matter which way they were turned, had absolutely neither head nor tail.

There remained my missal, the choice morsel. It was there on the table, marked with a broad red-wax seal. It was my only baggage when I had been handed over to the French policemen. I wondered why my military judge, with his trousers swollen like a balloon, was so interested in this missal.

This noisy man, with moustaches like Vercingetorix, was not very knowledgeable in religious matters. For him, a missal was a Bible.

Good, that was all the same to me! Yet that was where the crime resided. And, swelling his jowls, his hair bristling, the impetuous military man served me a dazzling syllogism: "If you have a Bible, it is because you are Protestant; if you are Protestant, you are German; if you are German, you are a spy of Hitler." I swore to myself never again in my life to return to France with a missal!

Fortunately, the next day, the Reich panzers approaching, the voluminous anti-Lutheran commandant hitched up his breeches for the Midi with the speed of a pregnant gazelle. Without this propitious rush of the panzers, the Protestant Passionary would have known, quite despite me, one martyr more!

In my turn, I was embarked, my forearms locked in two heavy iron bars, cast-iron balls at my feet, toward a series of new dungeons.

Never did I know of any other charge brought against me. I was beaten abominably. I was exhibited in public, naked as a sole in a fishmonger's window. I was denied the right to appeal to a lawyer. From the first to the last of my prisons, they absolutely opposed my writing the slightest letter, even to the French Minister of Justice.

Moreover, it was never deemed proper to tell me of what I was accused. They would have been hard put to advance any valid reason on that subject. Subsequently, neither the French police nor the Belgian police could, even after 1945, justify in any way their indictment of 1940 and the imprisonment that followed it. On the contrary, as will be seen, my chief tormentor, Minister Janson, retracting everything from top to bottom with unimaginable shamelessness, would promptly throw himself at the feet of the Rexistes after the debacle.

But I had come very close to perishing in the course of this odyssey, savagely massacred like so many others.

So close that for a time it was believed that the thing was done. When the corpses of my unfortunate companions assassinated at Abbeville were found, they were so unrecognizable, so disfigured by blows and decomposition in the sun, that it was necessary to refer to the convoy list. Now I appeared at the head of that list, having been pulled — miraculously — from my bench only to be shot already at Dunkirk. But this last detail the searchers did not know. For everyone, I was among that heap of putrefied corpses. The Völkischer Beobachter published the photo of the charnel pit, indicating that my corpse was in the pile.

Then a great report appeared, this time from a witness at Dunkirk. The author, a Dane, had seen me being taken away, blindfolded, flanked by troops, weapons in hand. He could not suspect that the outcome had been suspended at the very moment of the firing squad. He had even heard shots, some soldiers having fired to frighten me. He therefore boldly described my execution, attributing to me a few last words, strongly felt and of the best effect.

In short, I was dead twice. That was more than enough. Twice dead, the matter was settled as definitively as could be.

The dead are always sympathetic. And then, the war in France was not yet over when the charnel pit of Abbeville was discovered. Thus the story of my assassination was exploited as it deserved. Emotional articles were devoted to me. Berlin radio, in a special half-hour broadcast, piously evoked the stages of my life, so prematurely broken. One of my sisters, a sensible woman, thinking of my eternal rest, had two Masses celebrated so that God might forgive my numerous faults. Cost: fifty francs, which, as a good Ardennes woman, she promptly made me reimburse at the very hour when, weeping for joy, she found me alive!

Hitler ordered that my corpse be searched for. But I had two corpses, if one kept to the newspaper accounts. A proper autopsy was performed on the twenty-one dead of Abbeville. I was not there. They dug hard in the courtyard of the Dunkirk barracks, then at the citadel of Lille. I was not there. This Degrelle, dead twice and leaving his corpse nowhere, was becoming tiresome. They gave it up. And the affair had no sequel.

Here too, frankly, does one think that if I had been the head of the fifth column in Belgium, traitor No. 1, and all the rest of it, does one think that the Reich would thus have dropped me, dead or alive, as it did in June 1940, after its victory?

Not one clause was inserted about me in the armistice terms. Not one approach was made to the French authorities to verify whether I was still alive. Yet the whole Rexist Movement was waiting and anxious. My poor parents, tortured by grief, had rushed to Brussels to beg the German authorities to proceed with investigations. One telephone call to Vichy would have sufficed for it to be learned that I was still

alive and where I was. For the French police, for their part, did not let me out of their sight by a millimeter.

This total inaction of the Reich would be one more proof, if any were needed, that between Hitlerian Germany and me the links, before the war of 1940, were nil.

While Europe was regaining peace, while the most bitter enemies of Germany were returning to Belgium freely, with Nazi gasoline filling the tanks of their limousines, I was continuing, in the unoccupied zone, my tour of suffering, transferred from prison to prison. In fact they feared the visit of some armistice commission, which would have discovered my presence.

I was taken, chained like a galley slave, from Bordeaux to Tarbes, from Tarbes to Toulouse, from Toulouse to Rodez, from Rodez to Le Puy-en-Velay, suffocating in the narrow sheet-metal sentry box of the prison vans.

I was almost naked, wearing only a pair of trousers and big farm clogs. Everything else had been stolen from me: my money (forty-six francs!), my gold medal as a Belgian deputy, my shirt, my underwear, my shoes, my single pair of socks. My white wooden clogs were a gift from a fellow convict from the Île de Ré, a merry blade who had liquidated three bourgeois in one evening.

As transfer companions, courteous and pleasant companions, I had eleven French Communist deputies, from Florimond Bonte, with the little head of a studious clerk, dragging through our prisons a sack of eighty kilos of books, to Cornavin, aptly named, high-colored, a mountain-slasher, melodramatic.

One of these Moscowite deputies was my cell neighbor at Le Puy-en-Velay. A grievously disabled war veteran, he spat blood day and night. I intervened everywhere, afterward, to have him released. I do not know what became of him. But he was a very fine man. All of them were excellent Frenchmen. I saw their reactions when, as we embarked for the Île de Ré on the evening of June 19, 1940, they learned that France was succumbing. Their emotion, simple, poignant, was beautiful, pure. A Frenchman, whether of the left or the right, is first and before everything a Frenchman.

But none of them, and especially not my tubercular companion who was vomiting up his lungs, understood that the Germans did nothing for me.

I had to explain to them that it was absolutely normal. Why would they have intervened? What did they owe me?

I saw the moment coming when, as in the time of the Bastille, I was going to remain sine die in the French jails, on a simple lettre de cachet. In my case, they had even dispensed with a lettre de cachet! Certain Vichy policemen, as was learned later, were at that very moment secretly preparing — a month after the defeat of their country — to send me to a prison in North Africa.

I was saved neither by Hitler nor by a German of lesser lineage, contrary to what a hundred swindlers of the great press affirmed after 1945, but by a Belgian, a grievously mutilated veteran of the 1914-1918 war, amputated of both legs, the former Rexist senator Paul de Mont, who, by a providential chance, happened to be a refugee in exactly the last town in which I had been imprisoned, in Auvergne, at Le Puy-en-Velay.

Through an indiscretion of the doctor of the prison, he learned, stupefied, that I was alive, a few

hundred meters from him, in a cell.

At once he set in motion the local bâtonnier, rushed to Vichy, went to see the members of the Belgian government, shaking them like walnut trees. No minister, obviously, especially not Janson, could give any justification whatsoever for my arrest. They all stammered, ashamed of the role of torturers they had played. Pitiful, fawning, cajoling, they worked feverishly to have me released. It was the Pierlots, the Jansons, the Spaaks in person who intervened with the government of Marshal Pétain, who requested and obtained my release, whereas, new Pontius Pilates, they had so vilely delivered me to the French military police two months earlier.

Since the Belgian ministers, first of all, proclaimed my innocence and affirmed that I had been arrested completely wrongly, the Vichy government did not have to be more Belgian than the Belgians. Marshal Pétain consequently ordered that I be released at once.

This order had been issued following the direct intervention of the Pierlot government, which had undergone no influence other than that of one of the purest Belgian heroes of the war of 1914-1918. From Brussels itself, no German authority had intervened. Everything that has been told about alleged personal orders from the Führer and about the theatrical arrival at Vichy, "hardly had the French armistice been signed," of Brussels personalities mandated by the Reich to impose my release on the French government, belongs to invention and lies.

It was only a month after the armistice that one of my old university comrades, a man from Courtrai named Carl Doutreligne, arrived at Vichy. A cheerful fellow, very resourceful, he came, as an amateur, to try to find my trail. He had taken into his car the writer Pierre Daye, former head of the parliamentary group of Rex, as well as a Brussels lawyer, a Rexist provincial councillor of Brabant. Pierre Daye knew the Reich ambassador in Paris, Otto Abetz. He had gone to see him on the way. The latter had provided him with the desirable safe-conducts and had indicated his wish to receive me as soon as I should be found. For Abetz, I was the most prominent Belgian personality of the "new order" style. It therefore seemed appropriate to him that the Reich, in the event that I had escaped death, should enter into conversation with me. But when the three Belgian investigators disembarked at Vichy, the order to release me had already been given by Pétain five days earlier.

The Belgian government immediately received Pierre Daye, treated him with great consideration, swore by all its gods that my arrest on May 10 had only been an appalling misunderstanding, deeply regretted, that I was innocent, of course, that the members of the said government had done everything to obtain my release. They charged Pierre Daye with interceding with me so that I would agree to be reconciled with them.

Pierre Daye informed them of the plan Otto Abetz had formed to negotiate with me. Here too, there was complete approval on the part of the members of the Pierlot government. This approval was moreover to be confirmed to Pierre Daye in writing, as will be seen.

The news of my release, after having delighted Pierre Daye, soon worried him. For, in the five days since I had been released, I had appeared nowhere. He had the intelligence to proceed discreetly, with his two traveling companions, to an inquiry in Auvergne. They learned an astounding thing. I had indeed left the prison of Le Puy-en-Velay one evening, July 12 or 13, 1940. But policemen had been seen immediately shoving me into a hearse. Since then, no one knew what had become of me.

My adventure had not been banal. In the afternoon I had received notification of my release, scheduled

for nine o'clock that evening; meanwhile, by order of the Marshal, the prison authorities had to reequip me from head to foot, for it would hardly have been flattering to the good name of French hospitality if, perhaps as future head of the government, I made my joyful entry into Brussels bare-chested and with my feet shod in a cowherd's clogs!

The prison witnessed a procession such as it had never seen: tailors, shirtmakers, bootmakers bringing a whole display of suits, underwear, shoes, ties, socks, sock suspenders. I did not have one red liard. When I was quite sure that it would be the French State that would pay, I allowed myself to be reclothed without the slightest scruple.

At nine o'clock in the evening, the prison director himself ceremoniously came to open the door of my cell. I made, as one may imagine, only one leap toward liberty! But I had scarcely had time to glimpse the fine line of gold and silver which marked the twilight at the height of the gigantic statue of the Virgin hoisted upon a rock, when I had already been pushed into a hearse in the place of the dead man, and the van was rushing into the falling night. Policemen — I never knew which, nor on whose order — had spirited me away and were carrying me off at full speed toward the south!

In the very middle of the night, in mountainous and totally deserted moorlands, they tried to make me the rabbit shot, wanting at all costs to persuade me to get down to shoot with them one or another of those mammals, by the light of the hearse's reflectors. The rabbit would have been me, of course. Keeping to my role, I played dead more than ever, as was fitting.

After twelve hours on the road, my guards handed me over to Negro soldiers at the entrance to a vast cantonment surrounded by barbed wire five meters high, on the flank of the Andorra valley. It was the sinister concentration camp of Le Vernet, whose commandant was named Bernheim. I was pushed into a hut occupied by two hundred Spanish Reds, antifascists to the core, no doubt relying on them to ensure my liquidation with a discreet and nimble knife thrust.

But solidarity among prisoners is a strange thing. Everywhere, whether among the French Communists in Anjou, in Vendée, on the Île de Ré, or among the anarchists of the Frente Popular, I was quickly surrounded and protected by the spirit of comradeship of my fellow detainees. Just as on the evening of June 17, 1940, at Cholet, my Communist companions had saved my life by forming a square around me when drunken French officers wanted to cut me to pieces, so the Spanish Republicans — hard cases all the same — immediately set about helping me, like perfect comrades in misfortune. They were good fellows, picturesque as the devil. I was not a bad cellmate. And we were all members of the same party, that of the persecuted. They were veterans of misery, camping in that den for two years. They had manufactured strange camping equipment, little carved seats, old cans deformed to collect the regulation swill. With extreme kindness they immediately let me share in the material advantages of the community.

For in that camp of six thousand slaves, no one received the slightest utensil, not even a spoon, not even the bowl one gives to the mangiest of dogs. Many prisoners had to take off a shoe and hold out one of their ruined slippers to receive their ration of miserable soup! Scabies ate away at these thousands of men, piled up in unimaginable conditions of promiscuity, devoured by vermin, forced to relieve themselves ten meters from the barracks after perching on enormous iron barrels, repugnant, without water, with frightful smells, surrounded by millions of swirling flies, splashed by the pools of blood of dysentery sufferers. These filthy barrels, weighing sixty kilos or more, had to be carried processionally three kilometers from the camp each morning, emptied, and cleaned by hand in a river. Hundreds of little graves lined up at the end of the sordid huts.

The only lighting in the barracks where we were piled together was supplied by prehistoric oil lamps, made by the prisoners themselves from old pieces of cloth and a little vegetable grease scraped from the bottoms of improvised mess tins.

No one can form an idea of what those French concentration camps of 1940 were, where, by virtue of the whim of functionaries or left-wing politicians, three hundred thousand persons of both sexes and of every nationality were piled up.

While the French police so amiably offered me this new resort, the three Belgian motorists who were looking for me, informed of my latest abduction and unable to find my trail, had returned in haste to Vichy. They had shown their teeth, made a great uproar, let their indignation explode. Belgian ministers and French ministers, panic-stricken, had telephone calls made from sub-prefecture to sub-prefecture. In the end it was learned that I was near Spain, at that concentration camp of Le Vernet.

Jumping into their car again, my three musketeers drove full throttle toward the Pyrenees. Meanwhile my mysterious persecutors had parried this blow once more: one fine evening they had released me, provided with a travel order for Carcassonne. Asking myself what they wanted of me in that town, penniless, loaded with hundreds of lice and fleas, I got into a train where French soldiers, recognizing me at once despite my pope's beard, nearly tore me to pieces in the carriage. I had to hold a one-hour meeting for them in order to transform them into robust disciples. I arrived at Carcassonne at one o'clock in the morning: the house where I was to present myself was empty, of course, disused for two years! I wandered the streets until the following afternoon, famished, no longer understanding anything at all, expecting at every moment to be picked up as a tramp or to be torn apart by agents provocateurs.

It was then that, two meters from me, a car horn sounded violently: I saw my comrade from the Law Faculty of Louvain and his two companions. Empty-handed at Le Vernet, scenting the new trap, they had searched for me from town to town throughout the region and finally came upon me. I hoisted myself into their car, passed them my vermin, delighted by the change of terrain, and sped toward Paris and Belgium.

We stopped at Vichy, where I dined at the table of the Spanish ambassador, Félix de Lequerica. Several Belgian ministers came prowling, rather painfully, around our car to try to explain themselves to me. Old Janson, seeing the driver enter a urinal, slipped in beside him, ingratiating, attempting in that select place to start a conversation. The other, a plump Brusseleer, contented himself with vigorously spraying the bottom of his trousers without saying a word.

Janson, not losing courage, went the next morning to fasten himself to Pierre Daye's coattails, dragged him into his room, overwhelmed him with congratulations for having so happily found me and brought me back, and assured him that his colleagues and he were quite ready to resign. The Pierlot government warmly urged us to negotiate with the Reich and blessed in advance the reappearance of our newspapers, despite the German occupation!

Pierre Daye, smothered under these flowers and vows, asked, on my behalf, for written confirmation of these miraculous remarks. Janson, in agreement with his colleagues, had the following letter brought to us at the hotel a few hours later, expressing the sentiment of the entire Pierlot government:

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
Vichy, July 25, 1940.
CABINET - No. 1702
Hotel Albert Ier.

Dear Monsieur Daye,

I am having this letter brought to you before you leave Vichy. I wish to thank you for the zeal and devotion with which you have accomplished the mission with which we charged you [the mission of freeing me, I, their prisoner of May 10!] and we hope that, after the detailed explanations I have given you, you will succeed in dispelling prejudices and preparing a reconciliation in an atmosphere of national concord. [Reconciliation with the "traitor" Degrelle, of course!]

After our interview this morning, I discussed it further with my colleagues. I confirm to you that we are all ready to submit our resignation and to renounce definitively all political activity. As M. Pierlot said in his speech on Sunday, the government considers that its last task is to ensure the return of Belgians to the country.

All this you may say in our name both in Brussels and in Paris, where we strongly urge you to undertake the negotiations envisaged. [This concerns the negotiations proposed by Otto Abetz.] You may also indicate our agreement on the customs modifications of which you know.

Finally, as concerns the press in occupied territory, the situation is obviously quite different from that of 1914-1918. If, for your part, you could contribute to preserving for the newspapers published in Brussels as Belgian a character as possible, you would incontestably render a signal service to the country. For our part, we encourage the attempts which, we know, are currently being made in this direction.

Do not fail to keep us informed of your steps, and believe, I beg you, dear Monsieur Daye, in our best sentiments.

The Minister of Justice:

P.-E. JANSON

The next day I arrived in Paris. My rescuers had told me that my wife had left with all my children for France as soon as she had learned, on May 14, that I had been taken in the direction of the south. She had quickly been swallowed up in the whirlwind of millions of fugitives. Since then, her trail had been totally lost.

I saw Laval, de Brinon, and had searches made everywhere. But in vain. The mystery remained total.

The Reich ambassador, Otto Abetz, had very amiably invited my rescuers and me to lunch. It was a simple first contact, without going beyond political generalities that day.

One was nevertheless later to embroider on this subject extravagant stories of Abetz's interventions at Vichy for my deliverance, with his car bringing me back from Le Vernet, telegrams to the Führer, photos taken at the Ambassador's house, all grotesque tall tales. We had eaten on the terrace of the Embassy garden, poetically prolonged by the Seine. Otto Abetz had had installed in my honor, on the

lawns, the band of a Wehrmacht division: it treated us to serenades during the meal, while, relieved at having found once more the sweetness of life, I contemplated the green colors of the Tuileries foliage carried in the gilded blue of the sky. I spoke little; I was annihilated by my sufferings; my heart remained tight as I thought of my children, whom they were searching for in vain.

I left again for Brussels in the car of a decent Brussels tradesman, met on the terrace of Fouquet's where I had taken an aperitif in the company of the prefect of Paris, Jean Chiappe. My compatriot had, with rough good humor, offered me a place in his car. I did not know him. He had an enormous nose speckled like a potato. After a few hours on the road we arrived near the Belgian frontier. I watched, trembling with emotion, for the land that was coming: another five hundred meters... another hundred meters. It was my country!

Near the post (I had brushed against so many others in three months!) the Belgian gendarmes made much of me. I went to drink a glass with them at the neighboring café. Ah! how good the fatherland was, a fatherland where hatreds had been swept away, where everyone smiled at one another fraternally.

At Soignies, the car broke down. I had to hitchhike as far as the entrance to Brussels. There I prosaically took the tram. Yes, the tram! It was in a Brussels tram, free of charge (as a deputy), amid the good-natured crowd, that I arrived, at nine o'clock in the evening, at the house of one of my sisters, in Etterbeek.

This very familiar return was to become, in the "democratic" press six years later, a striking act of abominable treason: "That very evening, saluted by the German posts, Degrelle, still in Abetz's car — the enemy wagons! — returned to Brussels, drunk in advance with the power he hoped to conquer."

As for a German post, I had seen only a sentry in field-gray at a wooden bridge over the Somme. Refugees' cars were filing past by the hundreds: the sentry said nothing, asked nothing, did not know who I was.

As for Abetz's car, I did not even know what color it was! The "enemy wagon" had been a good tramway, rattling from Avenue Louise to Boulevard Saint-Michel!

That did not prevent this slapdash return from later being solemnly entered in my file as a war crime.

The first! I suppose that this darkly Hitlerian tramway is still under seal at the registry of the War Council in Brussels, as an overwhelming exhibit for the prosecution!

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VI

ALONE IN WAITING

My house and its “occupants.” - No visit. - Rex’s wait-and-see attitude during my absence. - Crocodile tears over my death. - Five lines, in the censored press, to announce my survival. - Absolute silence in Germany. - Each side holds its position. - Accounts between Belgians. - First, Leopold III’s opinion. -

The collaborationist rush.

The day after my return to Brussels, I went, my heart pounding, to the Drève de Lorraine to find my dear house again.

A sentry barred the main entrance to the park. Not that the Germans had taken measures to protect my abandoned property, which would have been rather appropriate if I had been Hitler's No. 1 agent. Far from it. Not only had the occupation authorities not seen to it that the estate remained intact, but it was occupied, invaded by numerous members of the Luftwaffe. The caretakers had been pushed back into a small house off to the side. Grasses a meter high had grown everywhere on the terrace. Fifteen or twenty German soldiers were moving about in the salons. A fat colonel was still snoring, naked and shiny, in the middle of my maple bed.

At first I thought there had been a misunderstanding. But no! Besides, I cannot repeat it too often: the Germans owed me nothing. They had requisitioned my house like any other building. All the same, since I had returned, I thought they were going to give my residence back to me. There were, at that moment, thousands of other empty dwellings in Brussels.

My proposals had absolutely no success. These gentlemen were comfortable in my house and firmly intended to stay there.

Unable to go on camping on a sofa at one of my sisters' homes, I obtained with difficulty, after two days of palaver, the use of one bedroom in my own house. That was all. Even then it was impossible to sleep, since the airmen were very noisily emptying, until the small hours, the last bottles in my cellar.

I expected to see my wife and my whole swarm of children return from one day to the next. If they had arrived, I would have had to put them up in a hotel. I ate haphazardly in little cheap restaurants in the neighborhood. This occupation became so disagreeable that nothing remained but to entrust the matter to a lawyer. He knew a German civilian, a friend of Goering, and got him to telegraph him. Thanks to this accident, the aviation offices finally received the order to evacuate the place, leaving me a house with floors scraped raw, paintwork chipped by radio apparatus, and where, in the way of movable property, there remained only, scattered in a cellar and having tempted no one during the Belgian pillagings of mid-May, my dear old illuminated atlases by Mercator, Ortelius, Kaerius, Blaeu, and other geographers dear to my heart.

I could, certainly, have addressed myself directly to the occupation authorities. But, strange as this may seem to my detractors, during the days following my return I had paid no visit to any German in Brussels. On the one hand, I had no obligation toward them. On the other, I did not know what was happening in Belgium. I wanted first to see. And, in any case, I did not want to assume the posture of a petitioner coming to offer his services.

On the German side, the same abstention was practiced. The military governor of occupied Belgium, Infantry General von Falkenhausen, and his staff did not have to concern themselves with me beyond measure. I had been arrested out of hatred for the Reich, that is certain, but arrested unjustly, without having been, in any way, linked to the Germans. The affair therefore did not concern them. They did not have to repair the errors and infamies of the Belgian police, even if, because of the invasion, they had given the Ganshofs and Jansons the opportunity to exercise their partisan hatred at my expense.

Yet, I admit it, I found the adventure bitter. I had suffered horribly. My body was covered with scars

and bruises. My teeth were almost completely wrecked. I had lost more than fifteen kilos. Everything I owned had been stolen from me. My house had been pillaged from top to bottom. The German troops had hung equipment everywhere in my house, puncturing or chipping the walls, causing damage amounting to tens of thousands of francs.

All the same, someone could have sent some vague orderly officer to help me recover my residence and offer me compensation for the damage the Reich's troops had caused. There was no approach, no visit. I received no support, no good wishes, no offer of compensation. I no longer possessed a centime. I had borrowed a thousand francs to pay for my meals in the neighboring eating houses. On my back I had only the ready-made suit that Marshal Pétain had had paid for me by the moribund Third Republic on the day I left the prison at Le Puy-en-Velay.

I managed to get myself out of my material difficulties only thanks to a truly comic payment. I was not dead; therefore I was still a deputy! Imperturbably, that good old democracy, which had sent me off to be massacred, sent me by check, shortly after my return, the emoluments for the three months during which I had survived! That made about ten thousand francs, which I had earned parliamentarily by being forced to drink the democratic urine of my guards and by taking their hobnailed boots and bunches of keys in the face. These salaries, as amusing as they were unexpected, enabled me to hold out when the trembling troop of my children finally arrived, uttering shrill cries, doing somersaults in every direction, while their mother, her hand on the door, could scarcely hold back her tears.

They too had managed. They had been noticed in a village of Limousin by Belgian refugees, who had loaded them all together into their car and brought them back to me safe and sound.

The attitude of the Rex members who had remained in the country in May 1940 or had returned from prison before me showed brilliantly how my strict conception of neutrality had marked my collaborators.

In private I was as neutral as in my articles and in my speeches. I had been so sincerely, so totally neutral that none among my friends risked changing anything in the line of the Movement, despite my disappearance.

Yet the opportunity was a fine one: everything was there to be seized--the newspapers, the radio, the main command posts of the country.

Not a single member of my staff made a commitment. If my attitude before 10 May had been only a facade, all of them would immediately have gone forward, especially after the ignominious way in which the democratic regime had treated us.

On the contrary, they prudently kept themselves from every compromise. From the first days of the occupation, the German authorities had come to offer my brother-in-law Charles Raty, managing director of Rex's press, the chance to take over the most important newspaper in the country, Le Soir. Politely, but very firmly, he declined the offer, tempting though it was. To accept it would have meant gaining an immense public. But each of our leaders applied himself to remaining strictly faithful, so long as I gave no new instructions, to the neutrality adopted by Rex from September 1939 to 10 May 1940.

Not only did they refuse Le Soir, they did not even bring out our daily paper Le Pays réel again. Everywhere newspapers were being reborn. The Germans wanted the press to reappear. In June they

had sent to the offices of Le Pays réel the authorization to publish. Le Pays réel did not appear. A whole team of editors was ready at its post: Jean Denis, the newspaper's doctrinaire, Victor Mathijs, editor-in-chief, Serge Doring, head of the foreign-politics section, Marcel Bailly, head of social news, Ernest Jamin, editorial secretary, the sports contributors, the administrative staff. Everywhere our daily was being demanded. The hour of triumph for our ideas seemed to have come.

Despite that, our newspaper did not appear, since no one believed himself morally authorized to enter into a policy of collaboration before I had returned and had made a conscientious decision. What would that decision be? My friends did not know: proof, once more, that our policy of neutrality had been absolutely firm.

In the end, since Le Pays réel did not come out, the Germans came and requisitioned our rolls of paper, which were used to print the false Nation belge.

That paper was never returned to us or reimbursed. We had truly had all the benefits of neutrality: imprisonments, blows, our goods stolen, our houses pillaged and occupied, the paper reserves of the newspaper filched! To be honest, to be upright, is always, in politics, a bad business. This wait-and-see attitude of the Rex movement, in June and July 1940--a wait-and-see attitude so understandable, nevertheless, on the very morrow of our country's invasion--had displeased certain figures in the German propaganda services, who were eager to get on with the job quickly.

In addition, the occupation authorities in Belgium had, from the beginning, clearly directed their policy in a hypercapitalist and racialist direction. The wolves of the money consortiums, the magnates of industry, the bankers of every odor exchanged peace kisses full-mouthed with the victors from the Dresdner Bank or the Westphalian-Rhenish basin. The Flemish national movement V.N.V., considered lightly as a future instrument of pan-Germanization, was supported, for its part, with obvious vigor.

My death had been deplored with more rhetoric than sincerity. In fact, it suited things very well; it rid the all-powerful cheats of high finance, whom I had roughly handled for five years, of a scarecrow, and it henceforth left the field free to the partisans of a Flemish overflow across the Brussels and Walloon space.

The Dinaso leader Joris van Severen having been assassinated on 21 May at Abbeville, Flemish political unity had been made possible. My death completed the clearing work.

There were tears, but crocodile tears. Numerous crocodiles, noisy crocodiles, crocodiles all the same.

The announcement of my resurrection caused a rather painful surprise in various duck-yards.

The fact that the Brussels occupation authorities abstained, on my return, from the most elementary gesture of civility--although I was, after all, the Belgian "new order" personality best known abroad--and the fact, too, that they had not even lifted a finger to have my house returned to me, were striking avowals of deliberate coldness and ill humor.

My return represented--whether this pleased anyone or not--an event for the Belgian population. For nearly three months I had been believed dead. I was alive. The public expected to receive details, to know my reactions, to read my plans. Le Soir had published, without disproportionate fanfare, while I was still in Paris, an interview with the university comrade who had helped me out at Carcassonne. That was too much! The German "Propaganda" in Brussels sent to the other newspaper of the capital,

La Nation belge, the order not to devote more than five lines to my return! On several occasions, La Nation belge had proclaimed my death under sensational headlines. When I was dead, one could ring the bells as much as one liked! But from the instant I was alive, one had to announce this unfortunate event in fewer lines than would have been devoted to the collision of two bicycles!

The Flemish press received still stricter orders. Volk en Staat, the V.N.V. daily, which then had a circulation of 180,000 copies, made my return known in three lines, in barely legible type, at the bottom of a second-page column.

Certain Flemish-nationalist militants discreetly shared the bitterness of the occupation authorities. With great emotion they would have given me imposing funerals. But I had had the bad taste not to die. That was not good.

If the Belgians could learn only in a few words that I was not dead, foreign countries learned nothing at all. The Brussels services of the “Propaganda” did not inform the agencies of the Reich that I had been found alive. An incredible story! The largest National Socialist newspaper, the Völkischer Beobachter, had at the beginning of June 1940 published an entire page on my life and my assassination, with the photograph of my corpse spread across three columns. All the press of the Reich had done the same, or nearly so.

Their millions of readers could not be undeceived. It was absolutely ridiculous. But it shows to what extent my return had disturbed certain little plans. From then on, maneuvers were under way, unofficially aimed at politically submerging our country in two stages: during the first stage, efforts would be made to have a certain number of Flemish-nationalist leaders, intoxicated, it was hoped, by success, occupy the command posts; then, with their collaboration, or without them, or against them, a policy of hasty assimilation would be carried through thoroughly.

In the development of such a plan, obviously, I could only be a nuisance. The Germans all knew that I was a fervent nationalist, that I was totally free vis-à-vis them, and that I would collaborate with anyone only insofar as the rights, dignity, and happiness of the Belgian people were assured. That was always my line of conduct. It was the only one that would have permitted, among Europeans, a real collaboration over the long term.

But in 1940, certain police Machiavels behind the Berlin scenes were resolutely determined to knead the occupied regions rapidly, to corrupt some, to intimidate others, to impose, in every invaded country, native acolytes--subalterns held firmly on a leash--in order to arrive at botched or insane incorporations, insane because they were founded on ambition, lucre, vileness, and the servile incompetence of primitives and quacks, instead of being built on honor, respect for the spiritual values of each people, and the rightly combined interest of the parties concerned.

It took me three years of obstinate resistance, sometimes stinging replies, and interminable conversations before the policy of collaboration in the West became clear and before the overly greedy maneuverers of Berlin themselves admitted that I had been right.

In any case, in August 1940, my reappearance took on, for these clumsy plotters and for the native domestic staff who lived off their scraps, the aspect of a small catastrophe. They thought to remedy it by smothering the news of my return in Belgium and eliminating it in Germany. This conjurer’s trick was merely comical. But long afterward, even on the Eastern Front, I could not speak to a German without his expressing his compassion to me over the terrible death of my father in France in May

1940. I was so young that it seemed impossible to them that I was the Degrelle of Rex. Hitler could have been my father. And then, that Degrelle had been assassinated with such a luxury of details during the Western campaign that, quite naturally, people tried to console in me the son so cruelly struck by that blow!

For weeks each side remained in its position: I set foot in no German's house and did not even send a visiting card to General von Falkenhausen. I gave no speech, appeared nowhere in public, and stopped the restarting of Le Pays réel. The Germans, for their part, behaved exactly as if I had not returned.

Physically in very poor shape, I spent my days recovering strength, stretched out in the tall grass of my garden, while the hollyhocks bloomed and, in the burning-hot greenhouses, the Gros-Noirs swelled. My children frisked around me like young goats. I filled my parents with affection; they had been badly shaken by the tornado: the war had ravaged their little town of Bouillon, damaged their home, and, three hundred meters farther on, reduced the house of my brother Édouard to ashes. My sisters arrived escorted by the leaping herd--a modest beginning!--of my two dozen nephews and nieces. A tenderly united family, whom nothing ever separated, we powerfully enjoyed the true joy--the only true joy--of loving one another totally: grandparents, spouses, brothers and sisters, children, all equal, with fresh hearts, colorful words, and explosions of affection and enthusiasm.

Some urged me to set German justice in motion so that it would punish those responsible for the monstrous assassinations and the thousands of arbitrary arrests of May 1940. I took good care not to. Our quarrels between Belgians had to be settled between Belgians. I filed a complaint with the Brussels prosecutor's office against my persecutors.

I was, moreover, tricked, made a fool of in masterly fashion. After months of procedure, I was told that I had never been arrested, since no arrest warrant had ever been issued against me. I had simply been placed at the disposal of the Auditor General! The rest was only a succession of regrettable misunderstandings! I got off with six thousand francs in lawyers' fees and paperwork!

But I preferred that. Never, from the first to the last day of hostilities, did I ask a German to concern himself with my disputes with Belgians. Ganshof van der Meersch was arrested by the Germans, but he was arrested for facts that in no way concerned me. As for Janson, during the entire war I never breathed a word to the Germans about his sinister inventions of suspect lists. I was on the Russian front when, having tried to slip away to London, he was picked up in France by the Gestapo. I learned of his internment, together with his death, only at the end of 1944, while reading a small Belgian newspaper abandoned in an Ardennes village during the von Rundstedt offensive.

He had succumbed--a tragic return of things--in a concentration camp, after long sufferings. At those hours, did he remember the thousands of Belgians whom he had basely sent into foreign concentration camps in 1940, the horrible agony of the unfortunate people who had been massacred because of him at Abbeville on 21 May, the little abbé who held his sticky eye against his cheek, the poor grandmother whose breasts had been pierced by thirty bayonet thrusts, Joris van Severen, the spotless knight? No doubt these dead surrounded him then as in a nightmare... God has brought them all together, the victims and the executioner, himself become a victim in turn, all mingled in His mercy...

Before deciding to undertake political action again, I wanted to have the formal agreement of Leopold III.

Certainly, the Pierlot government had, in writing, "strongly urged me to enter into negotiations" with

the Reich ambassador Otto Abetz and to collaborate with the German occupation authorities, notably by republishing newspapers “as Belgian as possible” (sic). But from the national point of view, Pierlot, his ministers, and zero, in August 1940, were exactly the same thing.

It was the King’s opinion that counted, around which wounded, defeated Belgium had fervently regrouped. He had taken care not to react at the time of my arrest. But afterward, he had harshly stigmatized that base political operation.

When my death had been announced, one of my sisters, seized by holy fury, had sent him a terrible letter, making him responsible--negatively--for my death. Despite the violence of the apostrophe, the King had immediately had his condolences and regrets conveyed to her, assuring her that these arbitrary measures had been taken without his knowing it, that he had learned of them at his general headquarters only when I had already passed into the hands of French military justice, against whose dictatorial omnipotence he had had no recourse.

Was this exact? Was it not? I now believe that, on 10 May 1940, the King coldly let us all drop, deliberately sacrificing us to his personal peace and, in addition, to reasons of state.

We had not been the first to be thus emptied overboard; this was learned when the affair of General van den Berg was clarified, in January 1940. And we were not the last, as those whom Leopold III led onto the path of collaboration after the capitulation of 28 May 1940 learned at their expense, only to be abandoned by him in 1945, when the defeat of the Reich had removed all interest from Germano-Belgian collaboration.

Twice, in the autumn of 1939 and during the winter of 1939-1940, I had formally asked Leopold III, man to man, whether I should maintain our “neutral” positions. If the King had been merely reticent, I would have cut the gas immediately, for the policy of neutrality could bring me only blows.

On the contrary, he had encouraged me very warmly. Now, at the time of our second interview, Leopold III had already established his secret military relations with the French and the British. That did not prevent him in the least from pushing us, from the wings of Laeken, to pursue the struggle for Belgian neutrality to the utmost! We therefore royally impaled ourselves on it--the expression is apt--believing that we were sacrificing ourselves for the country and for the Sovereign.

This was true, moreover, insofar as on 10 May 1940 we became the scapegoats of neutrality in place of Leopold III. But he gained by that only a few years of respite, before himself paying, and dearly, his share of the bill.

Knowing our sincerity, and having himself oriented us so formally, the King could have forbidden or at least annulled the abominable police roundup of 10 May 1940. The unfortunate martyrs of Abbeville were, for the most part, the innocent victims of their fidelity to the instructions of Leopold III. A word from him, during the eleven days preceding the massacre, would have saved them. He did not pronounce that word, neither in their favor nor in mine, doubtless judging that he could not, at such a moment, attract additional enmities by covering those who had scrupulously followed his repeated recommendations.

I do not protest. It is for Leopold III to judge in conscience whether he did well, already at that moment, to sacrifice idealists for dynastic reasons that surpassed our modest persons.

But it will be understood that after that adventure, during the summer of 1940, I was rather disgusted with the traps of politics and very little inclined to commit myself again into pitfalls. I was formally determined not to meet in Belgium any German whatsoever, not to undertake any action whatsoever--even the publication of a newspaper--without first having taken the clear and definite opinion of King Leopold and without having, at the same time, direct confirmation of his disavowal of the cowardly persecutions of which thousands of Rexists and I had been the victims.

I therefore sent the Sovereign a very frank letter (which the “Royal Commission” carefully avoided publishing after the war). In it I first protested vigorously against the unjust fate that the government of 10 May 1940 had made me undergo. Then I asked for directives. Until the moment I received them, I wrote to the King, I would wait.

I was, besides, the only one waiting. In Brussels, throughout the country, there was a blind rush to the feet of the victors. The most frenzied contemners of National Socialist Germany before the invasion were the most eager to play the valet and elbow their way forward, all as noisy as ganders.

Never had Belgium seen such a scramble.

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VII

THE V.N.V. VICTORIOUS

For Flanders alone. - The V.N.V. during neutrality. - Belgium as stepmother. - Staf de Clerq. - Senator Van Dieren. - Senator Borginon. - Gérard Romsée. - Élias and Tollenaere. - Praise of Borms. - The V.N.V.'s intolerance in 1940. - Its imperialism. - Liberation of the Flemish prisoners. - The crowds at the V.N.V.'s feet.

In August 1940, the great political victors in Belgium were the Flemish nationalists.

Not that the Vlaamsch Nationalist Verbond (V.N.V.) had served, before 10 May 1940, as an agent of the Third Reich. I do not believe that. And I have never believed it. The V.N.V. was a party of honest men, purely Flemish, exclusively Flemish. Only Flanders, its development, its greatness interested them. They saw only it, lived only for it. That was even an error on their part. For if, before 1940, a Fleming could still confine himself strictly to the struggle for a Flanders isolated in the absolute, after May 1940 regional problems, however stirring they might be, could no longer be conceived except as pivoting within vast complexes.

The leaders of the V.N.V. saw in the collapse of the West the unique opportunity to give the Flemish people the cultural and political unity for which they had struggled for years. For them, it was not a matter of serving the Reich; it was a matter of serving Flanders. Nothing else.

On 10 May 1940, the Pierlots and the Jansons had given themselves over to a manhunt throughout Flanders, as in Brussels and Wallonia. By imprisoning thousands of loyal Flemings in contempt of the Constitution and the laws, they had released the leaders of the V.N.V. from their duties toward a State which, with such hatred, such bad faith, and such stupidity, had basely declared war on them without

the least valid reason.

A Staf De Clerq, arrested and then released one day later without explanation; a Raymond Tollenaere, a deputy, dragged without prior authorization from Parliament from Belgian jails to French jails as far as the horrible prison of Caen in Normandy; a Timmermans, also a deputy, an invalid, shoved into the hell of the concentration camp of Le Vernet--they no longer felt the slightest respect for a State which had so maliciously cast them out, on 10 May 1940, from the Belgian community.

The Flemish question was already, before the war, an extremely thorny question.

For dozens of years, the Flemish people had been harassed in its dignity and in its culture. It, which had projected the glory of the great Netherlands across Europe for centuries, had, after the fratricidal Revolution of 1830, seen itself treated as an inferior people, whether before the courts, in the universities, in the army, in the administration, or in public life. It was the time when Flemish defendants found themselves condemned in the assize court without having understood one word of the proceedings; it was the time when, in Catholic colleges, Flemish boys were fined ten centimes by the supervisors each time they expressed themselves in the language of their people!

It had taken half a century of heroic efforts, resounding scandals, and violent parliamentary opposition, sometimes romantic, always relentless, to restore a just balance in a country where citizens of Flemish language and citizens of French language coexisted in roughly equal strength.

The rise of Rex in Flanders, where nearly one hundred thousand voters had voted for us, and our 1936 covenant with the V.N.V., had calmed the separatist fever and made conceivable the creation of a Flemish-Walloon federal State, the only intelligent solution--at the time, in any case--to the dispute.

During neutrality, from September 1939 to May 1940, the attitude of the Flemish people and of the Flemish-nationalist leaders had been absolutely correct. They, like us, felt interest in the National Socialist experiment unfolding in the Reich. But they, like us, had placed above everything else concern for peace, rigorously conditioned in the West by the maintenance of Belgian neutrality. Not the slightest deviation could be reproached to them. The fact that Minister Janson released Staf De Clerq, leader of the V.N.V., on the day after the day he had had him arrested proves sufficiently that the grievances against him were nonexistent, that it had only been a dirty trick, a sectarian measure which, by ignobly making use of the circumstances, aimed only at dishonoring and strangling the opposition.

Not only were Pierlot, Janson, and their henchman Ganshof stupidly stabbing the country with these thousands of hateful and unjustified arrests, but they were mathematically ensuring the breaking of Belgium in two in the event of a reverse. They were throwing Flanders, thus violated, into the arms of the Germans--a powerful and rebellious Flanders, which was always extremely sensitive to oppression and injustice. The conduct of the Pierlot-Janson clique on 10 May 1940 was absolutely senseless. It will never be said enough what a crime those miserable conspirators then committed against Belgium. If Belgium did not die of their knife stroke, truly it was not their fault.

The Germans unquestionably felt a predilection for Flanders. For centuries Flanders was one of the most famous jewels of the Holy Roman Germanic Empire. The latter gave it the chivalrous Maximilian, the Maintainer. Flanders, in return, gave it the tenacious Charles V, the Federator. The German and Flemish languages are of the same family. The blood is the same. A Memling, a Rubens, born in Germany, flourished quite naturally in Bruges and Antwerp. Mercator of Antwerp completed his work at Duisburg, and Beethoven's Flemish parents, on the left bank of the Rhine, gave birth to the

pathetic creator of the Eroica March. Dozens of glorious cities of the West, from Malines to Cambrai, still bear in their arms the old double-headed eagle of our fathers the Germans.

In 1918, Germany had pushed for the creation of a Flemish State, independent, but one which would strongly extend neo-Germanic influence as far as the North Sea, the old Mare germanicum. Defeated, the Reich had remained faithful to the Flemish autonomists of the time of William II, housing them, assuring their subsistence, whatever the governments in power in Berlin--Marxists, Christians of the Centrum, or National Socialists. The Germans, methodical in everything, are men who do not forget. In 1940, they had not forgotten the fraternizations of 1918. They returned to Belgium with prejudices favorable to the Flemings. By race, by culture, they were drawn toward them, disposed to support them politically.

Because of the bilious insanity and incommensurable malice of Pierlot, Janson, and company, the Germans found in Belgium a Flemish-nationalist movement immediately ready for large-scale work, whereas, if the Belgian government had behaved correctly on 10 May 1940, if it had not given itself over to criminal provocations, the V.N.V. would no doubt have envisaged collaboration with many more nuances. But the Belgian State had behaved toward Flanders like a stepmother. The rupture of the country's unity had been the doing of the Government, not of the Flemings.

That in no way means that the Flemish nationalists, engaging in the path of very close collaboration, put themselves body and soul at the disposal of the Third Reich.

The V.N.V. (and, in the summer of 1940, all Flanders stood behind the V.N.V.) was quite determined to make full use of the Germans, but not to serve the Reich for the pleasure of serving it. The game was even a little naive. For the Germans were very intelligent partners. They soon noticed that the Flemings, while being good and sincere comrades, while even courting them from time to time, while lending a hand to their principal initiatives, were Flemish nationalists above all, devilishly invasive, crafty, undulating when it came to promising, quick as cats when it came to seizing.

Staf De Clerq, the leader of the V.N.V., was the very type of the sly man of the soil, bearded like a faun, his plump hand always a little moist, his belly round as a Jacqueline, good-hearted, not vain for a centime, but marvelously artful, stubborn, shrewd even when necessary, a jovial Lamme Goedzak who did not let himself be bamboozled by tricksters. He obtained much from the Germans, gave them little, thinking first of his people and his soil. He was a decent man, who always lived modestly, happy in his simple house at the edge of the broom and heather of the Payottenland. Until his death, he did what he believed, in conscience, to be his duty as leader of his beloved Flanders...

The most restless and most original of his collaborators was Senator Van Dieren, the sentimental one of the family, a macropod giant with furrowed skin, shaking his hands far off as if they still emerged from the sleeves of his lawyer's robe. Very welcoming, cheeky like a schoolboy, he sparkled with wit, almost a mountebank, writing French--he, a Fleming--with a finesse worthy of the best epigrammatists of the eighteenth century.

He was spontaneity itself. When the Ganshof van der Meersch of the files of 10 May 1940 impudently returned to Brussels after the capitulation, Van Dieren went with great strides to the Palace of Justice and sent the stammering informer a pair of slaps such as had never been heard resounding in that sacrosanct Areopagus. It was perfect. Truly, the other man had not stolen the correction he received. Slaps like that do not fade and are not forgotten. Ganshof will carry them until his death on his ugly mug of a cheat.

Van Dieren, loudly applauded by all the dear masters, washed his hands in the cloakroom, then returned to his work. Five years later, the war over, the bilious slapped man took revenge and had good Van Dieren sentenced to ten years in prison for his pair of slaps! A good sport, Van Dieren defended himself with dazzling brilliance before the Brussels War Council. The trial was a continual fireworks display. But the judges' minds were made up. Heavy, decorated brutes, they answered his sallies with fanatical coarseness. And the joyous, exuberant Van Dieren went off, like so many others, to expiate in dungeon holes his crime of lèse-cassocked-one.

Indomitable, a legal wrangler of consummate skill, Van Dieren, from quibble to quibble, managed after two years in a cell to reintroduce his case before the courts of Liège where, to general stupefaction, he finally had himself triumphantly acquitted! A unique case. A case all the more memorable!

Quite different from Van Dieren was his colleague Senator Borginon, small, nimble, with tiny steps, wearing a great black opera-singer's felt hat, his eyes swollen behind the magnifying lenses of his glasses. With his pinched air, one would have taken him for a mathematics professor at the Petit Séminaire. He was the most intelligent man of the V.N.V., with a biting intelligence, without any gall, all paradoxes, rather sterile for that very reason, but agreeable to observe.

With equal skill and equally irresistible arguments, he would have defended God against the devil and then the devil against God, dazzling the court with his legal suppleness, with the pirouettes and drolleries of his mind.

Unfortunately, although he had scented the defeat of the Reich before anyone else and had quickly emigrated toward shadowy corners, his subtle intelligence, his irony so lively and so comic, served him for nothing in the last trial he pleaded: his own. Had he spoken Persian before Kanaks or Papuans, the result would have been absolutely identical. And, a colleague to the end, with one last cutting witticism on his lips, he joined in 1945 in the cells of Saint-Gilles his old and picturesque friend Van Dieren.

Three Flemish-nationalist deputies, all three very young, framed the easy-going and cunning leider Staf De Clerq.

The first to enter the arena at the beginning of the collaboration had been Gérard Romsée. The order--particularly stupid--to arrest him had not reached Tongres in time on 10 May 1940. The Catholic governor of the province of Limburg had shown his heels at the first burst of machine-gun fire from the Albert Canal. Gérard Romsée had replaced the fugitive. This appointment had been strictly legal, carried out according to all the forms by the Belgian authorities of the Ministry of the Interior. From then on it had appeared that Gérard Romsée would go much farther than that mothballed armchair.

He was a short fellow, with slicked hair, slanting eyes, and the flat cheekbones of a young Annamite. Simply dressed, moderate, always obliging, he enjoyed in Parliament the esteem of all his colleagues--Moscow-men, Wallingants, masons, right-wingers. Extremely pious, going each year to Lourdes on pilgrimage, modest as a self-effacing flower, he was the darling of his bishop, the barometer of good men. For a young girl with a celestial soul, he would have been the dream match. For a time there was talk of having him marry that ravishing Lily Baels who was so suddenly to give, shortly afterward, a fine big boy to Leopold III and a subject of passionate conversation to all the chatterers.

Disdaining shepherdesses and future princesses, Gérard Romsée had been a model deputy, youngest member of the Assembly at his first election, reelected automatically from then on, not on a V.N.V. list,

but on a special list, a list of his own, with a Christian name, which each time rallied an enormous number of voters. But Gérard Romsée had always remained the proper, settled young man, with only, sometimes, a little joyful cry and an amused flash in the eye when someone produced a risqué remark in front of him.

Serious, hardworking, methodical, he was always the balancing element of the V.N.V., the one who assumed, in the bastard Belgian State of 1940-1944, the heaviest official responsibilities, often the most disagreeable ones, regretting more each day that he had accepted them, paying for them in the end with a sentence of twenty years in prison, after having had, before his nose for two years, Death with cold and pallid skin...

His brother, still more unfortunate, had been assassinated at Tongres with a machine gun, savagely dragged from his cell.

The two other leading figures of the V.N.V., Deputies Élias and Tollenaere, were, in 1940, the most extremist elements of that party.

Son of an activist schoolteacher from the war of 1914-1918, harshly persecuted before being amnestied, Élias was as long as the poles of the hop fields of Aalst, sturdy, intelligent, devoted to his cause, sharp-edged, little inclined in 1940 to conciliation. Like Gérard Romsée, he spoke the German language correctly, which had assured him tactical advantages from the first days.

More ardent still than he was Raymond Tollenaere, a handsome Fleming with black eyes, black mane, full lip, nervous, resourceful. Like a certain number of his compatriots, he physically took more after the Castilian or Andalusian than the Nordic type. His harsh and unjust captivity at Ypres, Béthune, Rouen, and Caen had decided him to wipe the unitary State “Belgium” off the slate.

During the first months of the occupation, he was one of the most intransigent elements of the V.N.V.; he organized and commanded its militias. When the war against the Soviets broke out, he bravely left for the Eastern Front at the head of his boys and fell heroically on the Volkhov, not far from Leningrad, during the winter of 1941.

Father of four very young children, he had not hesitated for an instant to risk his life to save Europe from Bolshevism and to help bring the Germanic peoples closer together. But he too, like the principal Flemish leaders, thought first of Flanders. He wanted a strong Flanders in a Germanic Europe, a free Flanders, with Flemings masters in their own house, friends of the Germans, teammates of the Germans, but not Prussianized. He was sincere, an idealist. He died, clear-eyed, as a paladin of his cause.

As for the old leader Borms, former president of the embryo Flemish State of 1918 and condemned to death in 1919, he truly exercised no active role in the politics of Flanders during the Second World War.

In 1936, at the signing of the “gentlemen's agreement” between Rex and the V.N.V., it had been understood in low voices that our Flemish-nationalist allies would discreetly let the curtain fall again over the former separatist chief. His name was an element of conflict. We had then sincerely committed ourselves, each side, to the path of a Flemish-Walloon agreement within a Belgian State endowed with a federal status. Whether one was an admirer or an adversary of the old activist leader of 1918, it was better to set aside from our constructive work reminiscences which, purely negative, would have brought only disturbances.

Borms, prematurely aged by more than ten years of severe imprisonment, led before the war a retired life in the suburbs of Antwerp. He in no way tried to recover a political role. Yet, although he was ineligible, locked in his cell at Louvain, the great metropolis of the Scheldt had brought to his name a phenomenal number of votes, enough to elect him seven times deputy! Borms, whose conduct in prison had been courageous and very dignified, lived, on the eve of 1939, in a condition close to poverty, ailing, himself selling from door to door, at seven francs a copy, a small book of memories which constituted his only income. Flemings had had to establish a “fund” to keep him from dying of hunger.

I was in personal contact every day, in Parliament, with the leaders of the V.N.V.; I know very well that Borms intervened in no way in the political events which preceded the rupture of neutrality. He was a finished old man, shriveled under his little black antiquary's skullcap. Yet he too was thrown into prison by the madmen of 10 May 1940, sent to the far end of France into a concentration camp, treated with unspeakable barbarity by the French soldiers. At every stop of the train of “suspects,” he was dragged from the van, slapped, urinated on, pricked with bayonets, forced to kneel before the Senegalese and ask France's pardon! Several of my friends were on that train of pain and madness; all were profoundly impressed by the Christian serenity with which this impotent old man endured these vile torments, never complaining, but never, either, bowing his head...

During the four years of occupation, his political activity was nonexistent. There was a Flemish demonstration in his honor at the Théâtre de la Monnaie, then a German demonstration within the Senate chamber. Academic demonstrations, both of them. All that was retrospective. The man was broken down, quavering. He presided, for form's sake, over a vague official commission. In German circles, consideration was shown to him. But he was the past. That old man had seen every color of misfortune. His last days were softened a little. That was not a crime.

Even in September 1944, when, at the approach of the Anglo-American armor, he gained the Reich, he left the Flemish leaders to reorganize their offices in Hanover without visiting them even once and lived, far from them and from politics, in a little family boarding house in the Rhineland. He had no money. It was a young doctor of philology, Dr. Reusch, a sensitive and discreet man, who came each month on tiptoe to settle his bill...

After the war, the infamy was committed of making this old man on the edge of the grave, found in a hospital in the Reich, pay for acts he had committed a quarter of a century earlier and which King Albert in person had solemnly amnestied. The passing noise made around Borms from 1940 to 1945 had been only quasi-posthumous eloquence. It was the old account, legally erased though it was, that was brought out again. And this valetudinarian old gentleman was cowardly shot--worn to the last thread, whitened, shrunken, one leg caught in an apparatus, no longer advancing except on crutches, but still finding in his faith, in his convictions, enough energy to straighten himself proudly before his judges and to look calmly at the firing squad before dying...

A useless execution. A stupid and cowardly execution, which Flanders will not forget for a long time. Martyrs, sooner or later, have to be paid for.

One thing is certain, in any case: in 1940 several million Belgians were wearing out the pavement behind the victorious V.N.V., despite its glorifications of Borms and its imprecations against the State of Belgium.

Crowds are like that: they throw themselves without shame into the arms of the man who is winning,

whether he is right or wrong. It is not pretty, not pretty at all. But it is, alas, reality. The idealist fallen to the ground is savagely trampled; people persist in treading on him, even if they had acclaimed him the day before. But the man who triumphs, even if the day before he was being insulted, is certain of public prostration, with agile tongues around his boots.

In June, July, and August 1940, the V.N.V. was harvesting. It carried off three quarters of the posts of provincial governors in Flanders. It invaded the city halls. Powerfully seconded by the occupying authority, it caused the laws on linguistic separation to be given the maximum rigor and obtained the immediate and radical suppression in Flanders of the last French-language daily and weekly papers. It pushed its militants in mass into the teaching corps, the gendarmerie, and the Administration.

This reaction was normal. It was the riposte to dozens of years of unnatural Frenchification. Flanders had to be Flemish. That was logical. That was healthy. It was in no way an evil. And it had nothing incompatible with a team policy across the whole country.

Unfortunately, the ease of their success, the nameless spinelessness of the public, promptly intoxicated certain chiefs of the V.N.V.

From 1936 to 1940 they had been good companions in struggle for us, each maneuvering in his own sector but all helping one another with friendship. When I returned from prison in August 1940, I saw clearly that the state of mind was no longer the same. Not one gesture of friendship on my return. And, afterward, during the first months, a deliberate coldness, even haughtiness, which would sometimes be accompanied by certain undermining efforts.

It was not very friendly. But politics is not always a school of noble movements of the chin.

Nor was it very adroit. And in politics, a tactical blunder is much more serious than an evasion of feeling. The leaders of the V.N.V., in full stratospheric ascent, were committing in 1940 the grave error of failing to notice that the danger of Flanders being swallowed up by a super-victorious German State, strong with one hundred million inhabitants and believing the great day had come, was infinitely more serious, more real, than the risk of any absorption of the Flemings within a Belgian federal system.

Already, before the Second World War, in the Belgian State of 1939, the Flemings held power solidly in their hands; they were certain not of undergoing the future, but of controlling and dominating it. In 1940, after the fall of the West, the establishment in Belgium of a Flemish-Walloon federal status was an achieved demand: there was general agreement to institute it.

But, meanwhile, the idea of equality within a common State had been surpassed: the leaders of the V.N.V. believed that everything had now become possible for them, and they angrily rejected any idea of solidarity and team work with the non-Flemish elements--French-speaking Brussels people and Walloons--who represented the other half of the country. Going further, Staf De Clerq launched himself into a noisy campaign aimed at the colonization of Wallonia. Wallonia was to become Flanders' living space! The leader of the V.N.V. delivered several deeply wounding, deliberately wounding, imperialist speeches on this theme. He created, without even informing us, sections of his party in Walloon territory and demanded that various V.N.V. burgomasters and officials be appointed in Wallonia.

For years, he had struggled to eliminate from Flanders “Fransquillon” imperialism. We had supported him totally, because that demand was sensible and just. But, scarcely victorious, he claimed to recreate on a grand scale, for his own profit, in Wallonia, the injustices and errors which he had stigmatized the

day before in Flanders, when they wronged him!

Staf De Clerq did not wish to realize that, by considering half the country as a vulgar African land to be colonized and by treating us, his former comrades and covenanters, as obstacles to his policy of expansion, he was isolating himself dangerously. The day the Reich demanded more than he wished to give, he would be alone if he first persisted blindly in weakening and destroying us.

I tried in vain to explain to him how unfriendly his policy was--a weak argument; unjust--still a weak argument; and dangerous--a more decisive argument--for his party and for the Flemings themselves. We had always been for them sincere, loyal, ardent allies. But Staf De Clerq was certain of triumphing all alone and of absorbing, in ten years, the “living space” of the South.

His illusions soon flew away. One year later, before dying, he had already had time to recognize the error of his policy. The V.N.V., pushed forward at lightning speed by the Germans in 1940, would, with time, be quarantined by them, then almost openly persecuted in 1943 and 1944.

In August 1940, I had warned Staf De Clerq, Élias, and Tollenaere. Only Gérard Romsée was understanding and discreetly deplored this falling-out. But the others were unleashed. Volk en Staat published snarling articles. From morning to night, Staf De Clerq blew into the imperialist trumpet. Élias, Tollenaere, even Borginon, the astute Borginon, could no longer be restrained.

All means of propaganda were good. The most painful means employed, the most demoralizing, was that of the liberation of Flemish prisoners of war, to the exclusion of Walloon prisoners of war.

This discrimination was unworthy of the German army, which never wished to make any distinction except between the courage and cowardice of its adversaries: the soldiers of the Belgian army, whether Walloons or Flemings, had fought honorably; they all had to be treated in the same manner; either all had to be freed or none freed. To make their captivity and their freedom an object of political blackmail was an unworthy maneuver.

The German leaders--police people above all--who took, in June 1940, the decision to exploit politically the very human desire of hundreds of thousands of Belgian captives to be freed, and to require from them that they declare in writing their belonging to the Flemish race, on pain of seeing their misfortune prolonged indefinitely--those leaders committed a base act. And the V.N.V. itself was wrong to propose or, what is more exact, I believe, to accept and use this discrimination, in order to base on it its party policy and, above all, its policy of colonization.

For that is what the measure was aimed at: proving that the great majority of Belgians were Flemings.

Obviously, each poor devil who was rotting at the bottom of his Stalag in Brandenburg, Styria, or East Prussia, thinking of his kids, of his work, had to yield to the temptation. Eight tenths of the prisoners declared themselves Flemings.

What did that prove? If the offer had been made in the other direction, eight tenths of the prisoners would have declared themselves Walloons.

But this propaganda machine was a formidable weapon. Flemish commissions, extremely brittle and composed in good part of former activists of 1918, practiced inquisition in the camps, subjecting Belgian soldiers to individual inspections and examinations which evoked slave markets. According to

whether one was judged pure or impure by these commissions, one received freedom or was sunk into captivity until the end of the war.

These discriminations belonged to the most painful kind of electoral trafficking. They had an immense repercussion on Belgian opinion. For the mass, it was proof that the V.N.V. could do everything, that the Germans granted it everything it wanted.

The public ought to have been indignant at these human and inhuman recruiting drives. On the contrary, the V.N.V., because officially powerful, became extremely popular in public opinion. Volk en Staat climbed to astronomical circulation figures. Everyone proclaimed himself V.N.V., even in the Brussels bourgeoisie, the old bastion of anti-Flemish feeling! Everyone discovered Flemish ancestors for himself, had always been a partisan of Flemish reform! The V.N.V. received money from all sides, in floods.

I was the only politician to protest forcefully against these inequitable procedures, to point out to our Flemish-nationalist friends that this ballyhoo was immoral, that this fishing for prisoners was ugly, that the insulting campaign of colonization of Walloon “living space” would turn back against Flanders instead of strengthening it.

My words had no more effect than the toss of a nutshell on the shell of an old alligator. A wind of madness was blowing.

Besides, why would the leaders of the V.N.V. have muted their imperialist concert of that time? Thousands of flatterers and bootlickers--financial nabobs, business sharks, old party dotards--crawled around them, brushed their carpet with delight, showered them with compliments and bearer checks, begged for a smile, a little support.

The human hunt in the Stalags and Oflags developed with the feverish participation of those very men who should have been the first to protest. There were even generals of the Belgian army who, instead of defending their soldiers delivered over to this immense and vile bargaining, instead of at least showing their reprobation by abstaining from intervention in the maneuver, rushed in, jostling everyone, to take their profit from the operation. They, career officers responsible for the morale of the army and its unity, they who saw their country being broken in two by this base political operation, were the first to sound the charge, the most relentless in discovering--or inventing--Flemish ancestry for themselves. One-hundred-percent Liège generals, incapable of saying two correct sentences in the moedertaal, swore by all their gods that no purer men of Ghent had been seen since Jacques van Artevelde!

The capitulation of these starred harlequins, in search of personal profits, was ignoble. It was useless, for those reptile generals nevertheless remained in the box until 1945.

It was not an isolated case. In the summer of 1940, all the old “elites” were ready for any repudiation, in order to barricade themselves, or to seize places, or to enrich themselves.

The “forces of money” shone in the front rank of these flattened crocodilians.

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VIII

FINANCIAL COLLABORATION

The strange Baron de Launoit. - The double game of hyper-capitalism. - An afternoon at Coppée's. - Dinners with Empain junior. - The escapades of Baron Jean. - Raymond Delhaye up the collaborationist coconut tree. - Seven million in subsidies to the V.N.V. - Fraternization of the forces of money and the Militärverwaltung.

The Belgian business world was extremely prompt to collaborate in 1940 with the victorious Reich.

Why would it have hesitated? It was covered: the King, in his proclamation of 28 May 1940, had advised all his subjects to return to work. How was one to return to work, that is to say procure raw materials, obtain means of transport, distribute manufactured products, without collaborating with the occupier, the omnipotent dispenser and purchaser?

The first to face the problem was the number-one magnate of heavy industry in Belgium, Baron de Launoit. Handsome and imposing, an Aga Khan type, de Launoit was certainly the most extraordinary star to have risen in the gloomy sky of Belgian finance since Loewenstein's death.

Starting from almost nothing, a match-manufacturer with half a share, de Launoit had become the most important deal-maker in Belgium after an ascent full of mystery. Incredible stories in the Stavisky vein, all unverifiable--embezzlements, poisonings, female corpses blackened in an hour!--had made this Liège business baron, well before the war, a Balzacian figure, feared, flattered, but looked at by everyone with a strange eye.

The man was highly intelligent; he had known how to surround himself with a court of women whom he showered with sumptuous gifts and who gave him the worldly aura he needed. He rose because he had flair, audacity, sang-froid; but he also rose because, at the right moment, he had money easy to hand. He "sprinkled" money as no one in Belgium had ever sprinkled it. He sprinkled the parties, all of them, whatever they were. He sprinkled the nobility, notably an entire aviary of ruined men with coats of arms who served as aristocratic scenery for his personal theater. He would go by the millions, without hesitation, when the man, the woman, or the coup interested him.

When Rex shot upward, he subscribed at one stroke, in September 1936, on the advice of a Walloon Catholic minister, to one hundred and twenty thousand two-month subscriptions to our fighting daily, Le Pays réel! I shall always remember our stupefaction when we saw Count de Berlaymont arrive at the editorial offices of the newspaper, charged by him with settling at the newspaper's till this unimaginable subscription, which doubled our number of subscribers at a stroke! The bundles of Baron de Launoit's banknotes--two million francs!--filled an entire suitcase!

That same week he sent us, as a gift, four powerful armored trucks, no doubt to go gathering love-herbs in the dew of the Meuse.

Then everything fell back into silence. Never again did de Launoit give us any sign of life. For our part, we took care not to pursue him.

As for our miraculous Count de Berlaymont, a fellow full of heart, nerve, and picturesque quality, a

born organizer of coups d'état, he had set up on his own account, in the Condroz, thanks to important subsidies from the same baron, a marvelous shock brigade composed of anti-communist Cagoulards. Several hundred sturdy peasants of the region had been armed to the teeth, engaging in extraordinary machine-gun practice with the complicity of the local gendarmerie. They fired from morning to evening. De Launoit had paid for the armored trucks--ten of them--intended to transport anywhere in the country, at the first alert, the pack of these sympathetic and warlike bang-makers.

The plot was childish. Count de Berlaymont's neighbor, the peaceful and plump Count d'Aspremont-Lynden, whom all this racket in his crops was worrying, learned, by a fortunate indiscretion, that the Sûreté was aware of these rustic concerts and was going to intervene. Berlaymont had just enough time to run to the border and expatriate himself.

De Launoit did not worry over so little. He covered himself on the right and on the left, regularly and princely. He had no humbler train-bearers than the Liège socialists: Truffaut, little Truffaut, the buffoon deputy in light checked trousers, scurried around him in public like a basset hound. But this money man had other figures at his disposal. Henri Jaspar, the former Catholic prime minister, leader of the Liège right, was one of his most visible, most useful, and most favored henchmen. When de Launoit, still a green gallant, wished to graft on a second youth and wanted to marry religiously a tender little lamb whose ancestry had long pleased him to the highest degree, Jaspar led the offensive in Rome, brought in the nuncio, cardinals, the Dataria, and all the heavy Vatican artillery. De Launoit, although he had an adult son, obtained the annulment of his first marriage, for "non-consummation," the commentators specified with a wink. Cost: half a million. As for the "unconsummated" woman, she could go take a walk, leaving the field open to the rising guard!

On the eve of the war, de Launoit had reached the summit of power. He handled twenty trusts, in Belgium and in the Congo. He alone had covered, at Liège, the fabulous expenses of the Water Exhibition--of which he had been made president so that he would cough up, if one may say so. He entertained hundreds of guests opulently, in the middle of the Meuse, on a dazzling yacht that had cost several million and had been built only to serve as a backdrop for these Sardanapalian receptions.

De Launoit had his men (and his women) everywhere. He had even ended by insinuating himself very far into the Belgian royal family. In this, as in many other things, he had imitated Loewenstein, who had once taken as secretary--a nineteen-year-old secretary!--a young idle duke, first cousin of Leopold III, whose exploits had soon provided material for the chronicles.

De Launoit, for his part, had turned toward the ladies. He had placed at the disposal of the Duchess of Vendôme, sister of King Albert, the magnificent Château d'Argenteuil near Waterloo. Her daughter, the elegant, fine, blond Geneviève de Champonay, first cousin of Leopold III, stayed in another of the baron's estates, the picturesque manor of Modave, marvelously perched high above the Hoyoux.

The result was that the skillful de Launoit finally found himself almost among family in this crowned world. In 1940, after the capitulation, he was one of the rare Belgians who found access to the Palace of Laeken. The jealously guarded door of Leopold III's apartments remained open to him throughout the war. In June 1940 he personally received from the King all the approvals and authorizations he desired. The great Belgian fraternization of the forces of money with the Third Reich dated from that licet.

Baron de Launoit's influence at the Château of Laeken increased more and more each day during the years of occupation. During the winter of 1942-1943, de Launoit was one of those who decided Leopold III to reject the request of the Pierlot government, when the latter asked the Sovereign to

protest publicly against the forced dispatch of Belgian workers to Germany. It is almost needless to add that at the "Liberation," when around one hundred thousand poor devils and scapegoats were shoved into the Belgian democratic jails, de Launoit did not spend a minute in the cells. Democracy = plutocracy!

The last dead of the fighting on the Lys, at the end of May 1940, were scarcely buried when a formidable 49 percent - 51 percent consortium had welded one of the most powerful bastions of heavy industry on the Meuse to the heavy industry of Hitler's country.

Soon all the Liège steel industry followed suit. From the end of
June 1940, these gilded lords were crisscrossing the road from Liège to Brussels, where they came to assail all the paper-pushers of the Militärverwaltung with proposals.

Gasoline was not lacking for these philanthropic journeys. It flowed from a picturesque source: it was bought fraudulently from German distributors by the true inventor of the Belgian black market, the own brother of the socialist minister Wauters, who resold, at five times the price, thousands of liters of Wehrmacht gasoline to the eager lords of collaborationist industry.

Certain Belgian wheeler-dealers had long since taken out guarantees across the Rhine. The most shameless case was that of the soda magnate, John Ernest Solvay.

When, in 1937, I had challenged the then prime minister, the professor-bankster van Zeeland, to an electoral duel, one had seen this John Ernest Solvay, a sad little dry stick, washed-out, sly, pot-rummager, throw mad sums into the struggle, spend six million francs in about twenty days to counter me. I had been provisionally defeated by those millions. But six months later I took my revenge, setting off in the long heron legs of the head of government the pre-atomic firecracker of the National Bank scandal, which put an end to the ministerial career of the eminent and ill-starred "kitty-man."

What had the Solvay-van Zeeland agreements been (for in that world nothing is done for nothing)? It was never known. Once van Zeeland had his nose in the sawdust, the little toad Solvay no longer interested me.

What astonished me, by contrast, was to learn later that at the very moment when he was wasting six million to get elected, with the noisy support of the communists, a van Zeeland promoted as defender of the "democratic institutions" threatened by "fascism," the said John Ernest Solvay was paying exactly the same sum, to within a pfennig, to works of the Hitlerian Party in Germany!

From then on, in the business world, certain far-seeing freebooters cynically played on the two opposing tables, paying on both sides while waiting to collect on both sides.

Still, these high-toned gentlemen were fairly shaken by the events of May 1940. Most of them, abandoning their workers, had taken to their heels as far as the Pyrenees, swift as chamois.

To renew personal contacts in Germany, immediately after the defeat, was very complicated for them.

They did not know the heads of the German military administration in Belgium, and they were absolutely convinced that everything was henceforth going to be managed by the new parties. They burned with the desire to secure protectors there, as formerly in the old democratic jalopies.

Thus, as soon as I returned to Brussels, I saw all sorts of mysterious emissaries arrive at my house, speaking in low voices of the very lively sympathies felt toward me by dozens of amiable marsupials into whom I had nevertheless planted solid harpoons before the war, during the relentless hunts I waged against the whales of politico-finance.

I was invited. These people wished to know me, to consult me, and to salute in me a renovator!

As for me, I was determined to see people, to know exactly the whole chessboard of the country before committing my own pieces again. I therefore went to some of these invitations. I did not regret it, for in that way I gave myself a spectacle as funny as it was instructive.

One of the quickest to ask me to tea was Coppée, the Évence Coppée of benzol supplied to the armies of William II in 1914-1918.

He received me in his town house on Avenue des Nations, a massive false-Louis-XVI château strangled within a few meters of yellowed lawn.

What interested me most at his house were the Brueghels hanging on the walls of the smoking room, tiny Brueghels but of divine perfection. They contrasted sadly with the crimson mug of their owner. His eye narrowed, small, sly, his jowls purplish in patches, like badly bled haunches, his thick hands hanging loose, he looked like a vicious, somewhat decayed bishop, gone out in civilian clothes for a debauch. His tongue was thick and he seemed in no way genial.

He made amusing efforts to display before me his New Order credentials. To hear this old buzzard, there had never been in Belgium a more ardent fascist than he. He was Mussolini's friend, had been received in Rome by him. In his eyes the salvation of the world existed only in corporatism, a corporatism in which, of course, the coal and benzol of the Coppée trust would have a choice place.

I emptied my cup of coffee silently, in little sips. It was good. Coppée, whom the use of speech was exhausting, had skin more violet than ever. I listened, waiting for the sequel.

He had to continue his speech: he was a fascist in ideas, but also a fascist of the purse! That seemed incredible to me, for physically he had absolutely all the reflexes of a skinflint, the gestures of a cat that extends and withdraws its claws, the eye-tics of someone who calculates and weighs. Yet he explained himself: he had financed Pierre Nothomb's Action nationale, supported this budding fascism at the cost of several hundred thousand francs, non-devalued francs, he insisted. It seemed that the memory of each of the banknotes sacrificed to this great and noble cause still made him suffer.

If necessary, he would suffer again. I thanked him for the tea and went out. He watched me leave, uneasy, his body twisted like that of an old tomcat no longer sure of his reflexes.

The contacts with the Empain plutocrats were still more picturesque. The Electricity trust delegated to me the hope of the tribe, Empain junior, Édouard Empain.

He wished to do things properly. He invited me to dinner in the private room of a discreet hotel, visibly reserved for declarations other than professions of pro-rexist faith.

What has always astonished me most among these money men is to see how, politically, they were old crusts. The smallest socialist or Muscovite propagandist of Quaregnon, Marcinelle, or Seraing has a

much more nimble mind than they do. Empain junior surpassed everything in banality. Not a bad fellow. On the contrary. A little sacristan-like in a family where people had not always lived in the sacristy. Peaceful. In agreement on everything, on everything he understood and on everything he did not understand. But as limited as a New York cemetery.

Sweating good will, he was absolutely incapable of imagining what was taking place in the universe. Perhaps, in his specialty as a deal-maker, he was competent? It is possible. Yet I doubt it. I have often wondered how such simpletons got through their functions. No doubt they have capable clerks? In any case, I would not have taken the responsibility of making one of them a supernumerary in the direct-tax office or a communal secretary at Sensenruth or Mogimont.

At the moment of settling the bill, which was very modest besides, Empain junior turned his wallet over in every direction before me. He had the reputation of being the king of penny-pinchers. I saw the moment when I was going to have to advance five louis to this pauper. Finally he looked for his pen, did not find it, asked for a penholder and an inkwell, stammered excuses, and signed a check, to pay for two soles and a filet américain.

Not wishing to remain in his debt, I invited him to lunch at my property on the Drève de Lorraine. He arrived at the normal hour for after-lunch liqueurs, dragging a bicycle by the hand, metal clips at the bottom of his trousers, wretched as a peddler, streaming with sweat from having been lost for an hour and a half in the forest paths. He was still more crushed by his impotence of mind than the first time. My wife, stupefied, tried to animate the conversation. But visibly this good fellow belonged more to the vegetable kingdom than to the animal kingdom.

The most terrible thing was that he had discovered a lively attachment to me. He invited me again. This was becoming serious. I passed by his residence like a gust of wind. His office contained remarkable Boulle furniture, with marvelous inlays. But this refined furniture was massacred by the presence of two hideous safes, enormous as cargo-ship boilers.

Thereafter, Empain junior insisted again on strengthening the contacts between us. During my childhood, I had contemplated ruminants of all kinds in the Ardennes fields. I knew the spectacle thoroughly. I delegated one of my collaborators to this phenomenon. He too never understood what was going on behind that red face, behind those round eyes, under that somewhat frizzy hair, half thread, half wool.

The good Empain then made excursions toward the V.N.V., tried for a whole year to have himself named by Gérard Romsée as commissioner-general for sports (no doubt because of his bicycle). But he was still just as atonic and bovine. Pierre Daye was preferred to him, who, having practiced nudism and attended numerous boxing matches in the Belgian parliament, was perfectly indicated for such supervisory functions.

Much more adroit than the Édouard Empain of Brussels was the Jean Empain of Paris, all-powerful master of the metro.

He felt at home in collaboration as quickly as a bleak thrown back into the river finds itself again in the current. He was no ordinary reveler, having taken across all the seas of Europe his yacht lit up with flower-girls, naked as fig leaves. The success of these Eves, who tolerated sails only on the topsails of the boat, had been such that Jean Empain's floating paradise had been successively banned from every port in the world.

Empain had crowned his exploits, one night of orgy in the land of Cleopatra, by cutting into little rounds the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Nile (which the king of Egypt had just bestowed on him) and obliging each of his guests to apply one of them as a cache-sex!

I do not know what rounds the impenitent frolicker had offered to the representatives of the Reich in France at the end of 1940. In any case, in Paris he enjoyed unlimited prerogatives, king of the pavement, noisily carting from Fouquet's to Maxim's, in a prodigious luxury car with a long chromed and ringed exhaust pipe, a litter of dazzling women who, with or without the Grand Cordon of the Nile, feasted at his side every evening amid champagne, roses, and carnations.

"Monsieur le Baron," before whom maîtres d'hôtel and lackeys dove as though they were at the swimming pool, bundled up millions thanks to his metro, which, monopolizing circulation, had briskly doubled its receipts.

No restriction decree of any kind was ever applied to him. He had been very closely linked with the appealing, so beautiful, so human actress Corinne Luchaire. He financed her father at Les Temps nouveaux. Luchaire repaid him for this with his powerful friends of the Reich. It was collaboration in three stages, where each found his account.

The merry viveur of Paris, the little miserly beadle of Brussels--all that meant the same trusts, the same safes, the same sacks of coins. One rolled in a maharaja's car. The other sweated on his bicycle. But the gold piled up in common betrayed neither the perfume of the sun-drunk water-nymphs on the Adamic yacht nor the smell of the leather of the New Order boots polished in Brussels and Paris by the family.

The most tenacious of these sniffers-out of collaboration was the man named Raymond Delhaye, the ersatz Vaxelaire of the Bon Marché department stores in Brussels.

The official Vaxelaires and he had in common an almost childish passion for compliments, decorations, and receptions. The best known of them, Georges Vaxelaire, a little crooked man as amiable as he was ill put together, had specialized in the lyrical and consular genre. Bearing palms, gilded, jingling, submerged in glittering plates and aigrettes, he always looked like an old Sicilian mule entering Catania on a feast day.

Raymond Delhaye came from the same breed. He had had to renounce following the legitimate heads of the house along the flowery path of the muses. There truly was nothing to be done, either in prose or in verse. Apoplectic, with an almost nonexistent forehead, as wrinkled as a refrigerator pipe, a heavy body, sticky skin, constantly mopping himself, he had, until May 1940, limited his ambitions to South American diplomacy. He had obtained, after much effort, a vice-consulate: of Nicaragua, I think, or of Venezuela, or of Guatemala; in any case, something ending in a... By establishing the protocol hierarchy of countries in alphabetical order, and beginning from the tails of the words, he therefore came first...

The occupation of Brussels, on Friday, 17 May 1940, was for him the unhoped-for opportunity to go still higher than the a of Nicaragua. He had stayed in Brussels. Why? The designs of God are impenetrable. No doubt the Almighty destined him for great things. Delhaye, submitted in advance to the Lord's boldest plans, went for a stroll through the empty ministries on the 16th, the day of the general flight. At that time everything was needed in those gaping offices: doormen, window-cleaners, attendants for the lavatories. Our adopted Nicaraguan offered his services. He was hired. He was

entrusted ad interim with a vacant secretariat-general, vacant like everything else.

The man, if he was vain, was not a blockhead. A worker, he was capable, while mopping himself a great deal, of producing work. But this accidental secretariat quickly gave him astonishing vapors. By August 1940 he was already perched at the highest point of the coconut tree of collaborationist careerism. He saw himself as minister. Who knows, prime minister! He gathered at his house ex-politicians, bankers, jurists. He was in regular correspondence with General von Falkenhausen. He burned to embrace Pierre, Paul, Rex, and me. He invited, presented, fraternized, squared himself, strutted like a peacock. The dishes were fabulous. Certainly Delhaye sweated hard, at table as elsewhere. It was embarrassing. At every moment he put down his fork, pulled from his Zouave trousers two or three handkerchiefs comparable to hand towels, and dabbed himself. One instinctively looked around for a gardener's watering can, and the telephone number of the city firemen was on the tip of one's tongue. But the quality of the food made the rest pass.

Unfortunately, what had to happen happened. Despite all the stomachs he had filled, he was put ashore. The office-seeker did not even understand that he was being thrown out. He made to his astonished ex-half-colleagues a departure speech in the style of Richelieu's testament. Delhaye firmly believed he had given birth to a masterpiece. He did not obtain its publication in the newspapers, because at that moment the Bon Marché was not distributing advertising placards. But he had copies of his harangue sent, in French and in Flemish, throughout all Belgium.

It was important not to forget the dear occupiers! Thus Delhaye had an impressive translation composed expressly for them. The last of the Brussels Gefreiters received it, with a card dripping with moved and eager sentiments.

An intimate luncheon was necessary to commemorate this lofty literary event. Delhaye invited me to his table the following Sunday; I had not immediately grasped the extreme importance that such a document was certainly destined to assume in the history of eloquence and letters. I came to the meal quite innocently. Hardly had Delhaye swallowed his soup and soaked his first towels when he took out, still warm, hidden (the treacherous thing) beneath his melting posterior, a folder containing the sheaf of letters of praise that his marvelous address had earned him!

His readers, a little taken aback, had wanted to be polite. And then, the Bon Marché is the Bon Marché. It is better to be on good terms with the big people, even if it means flattering their little manias. There were therefore in the pink folder one hundred letters, one hundred and fifty letters or visiting cards, each as banal as the next, but stuffed with grandiloquent compliments.

Delhaye did not spare us a single one of the tributes paid to his genius. The luncheon was ruined, for the host smashed the censer on his own nose until nightfall. He finished in a puddle of water, his back streaming, absolutely convinced that a man so praised by the universe was now certain of his portfolio in the ministry I was going to form.

I admit it: if I had created in my government a Ministry of Bores, Delhaye would have obtained the portfolio without competition. I would even have handed him a Ministry of Irrigation in a period of great drought.

If so many omnipotent bigwigs of finance and business were running after me with their coffee, their tea, their soles, and their wedding cakes, the leaders of the V.N.V. had been the object of just as pressing approaches from personalities of the hyper-capitalist world. They had responded by pocketing

the coins and snickering.

Their cynicism almost had the character of a student farce: "If these imbeciles absolutely want to flatten themselves before us, why should we not amuse ourselves with the spectacle of their servility and baseness!" they exclaimed. "And if they want at all costs to contribute to our propaganda fund, why should we not use their money, if only to sweep them away?"

One may judge the degree of spinelessness of the money world by learning that the V.N.V., which loudly announced that it was going to blow up the Belgian State, received from the leaders of Finance donations amounting in a few weeks to seven million francs!

No mistake of interpretation should be made. It was not because they regretted their anti-Belgian proclamations that the Flemish nationalist leaders were showered with banknotes and checks; on the contrary, it was because they launched such proclamations. It was because Big Finance was afraid of them, and especially because it believed them to be well received by the Germans of Berlin and Brussels, that it showered them in 1940 with such prodigality.

That was the whole matter. If so many business caimans tried in 1940 to tame me, it was not because they wished to encounter in me a good patriot, but because they secretly hoped to attach to themselves a bad one. What they wanted was to find in Rex, in the V.N.V., well-placed agents who would support their interests with the occupation authorities. Nothing else. I realized this with fury several times. Each time I explained that I was not at all a man of the fifth column, that I had been arrested absolutely without reason by the Janson gang, that I was in no way tied to the Third Reich and had established no contact with the Militärverwaltung, faces became hermetic; I no longer interested them.

Thus the Belgian plutocrats looked elsewhere. Little by little, in climbing the rungs of the German occupation administration, they realized that within it there were quite a number of representatives of the old capitalist forces from across the Rhine, with whom it would be easy for them to deal and arrange matters.

The Reich needed cannons, machine guns, ships, that is to say those who produced them or financed their production. The German government in Belgium, directed by an ultra-conservative squire, very rapidly revealed itself as the ally and support of the hyper-capitalist forces that, before 1940, had dominated the Belgian democratic regime with all their weight.

In Brussels, Liège, and Antwerp, one was going to witness an absolutely fabulous economic collaboration, the best in Europe according to Goering's judgment: simple collaboration in 1940, double collaboration from 1941 onward.

Wars are bad business only for idealists. While they sacrifice themselves, suffer, or die, others live.

Belgian High Finance was going to live, and live well!

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IX

FREEMASONIC COLLABORATION

Twelve thousand letters. - The French Freemasons at Pétain's feet. - Tea at the Devèzes'. - The father and the son. - Invitation from Count Lippens. - Project for a common team. - Written offer to upset the Constitution. - Tschoffen, Cornil, Hayoit de Termicourt, De Staerke: Degrelle-lovers like Lippens. - New letter from Lippens. - The support of the German Freemasons. - The Freemasons of the Palace of Laeken.

Never did the basic amorality of crowds appear to me so glaringly as during that ardent month of August 1940, when the purple beeches of my park glowed warmly, as though wet with sun.

The postmen took turns bringing me each day's mail. From all over the country, from the most distant village, there came to me crawling letters, pleading letters, and sometimes sincere, pure, touching letters. But, taken as a whole, the people who wrote to me thought that I had won and that I could give them something.

I had been dragged through the mud before their eyes on 10 May 1940. Since then they had read, at most, a few lines announcing my return. That was enough for them. Before writing to me, they should have verified the accusations launched against me a few weeks earlier and should have addressed themselves to me only after being certain that I had really been cleared of all suspicion. Yet it was enough for them to think that I was in a position to do them a service. So much self-interested eagerness wounded me.

Certainly, I knew that the future, by opening the official archives and confounding the impostors, would make my loyalty shine forth clearly. Janson's letter of 25 July 1940, by itself, constituted for me the most brilliant of vindications. But they knew nothing, had asked for no explanation, either when I had been arrested or when I had returned. They rushed toward me because they were thinking of a relative to be freed, war damages to be claimed, some sort of position to be obtained. The rest--whether I was a victim or a swine--did not interest them in any way.

When I arrived in Brussels, my first reaction with everyone had been to protest my patriotism and to stigmatize my tormentors. People looked at me smiling. I can still hear one of the highest personages of Tout-Bruxelles reply to me, slightly sarcastic: "But, my dear friend, all that no longer has any importance; you can proclaim that you were in league with Hitler and announce a meeting at the Palais des Sports: fifty thousand people will crush one another in order to celebrate and acclaim you!"

Such, alas, was the case. Crowds do not side with the just, but with the strong, whether the strong man is just or unjust. In a few weeks, I received twelve thousand letters from bootlickers--twelve thousand!--entire bales of them. Most often they began like this: "Mr. Prime Minister," "Mr. Governor General..." I rejected these courtier-like flatteries with disgust and anger, taking account only of requests coming from prisoners' wives. Those at least had the excuse of a home to rebuild, and I forgave them everything in advance.

At the same time as I had been the object of the first approaches by the magnates of coal, electricity, department stores, and money counters, I found myself invited to fraternizations by the men who had always been farthest from my affinities: the Freemasons.

I love everything that is clear and loyal; intrigues in the shadows have always repelled me instinctively. On the other hand, I am Catholic. Raised in a burning atmosphere of faith, I had seen Freemasonry,

from my childhood onward, as the No. 1 enemy of Catholicism.

Rex, adversary of all the internationals that were secretly undermining the country, had often and violently risen up against these subterranean mafias which, as much as the Marxists and the Jews, had pushed toward the European war in 1939. The Lodges had been particularly responsible for my arrest on 10 May, for those of thousands of my comrades, and for the horrible death of the twenty-one martyrs of Abbeville.

When I returned to the country, I imagined that these bellicists with triangles had hidden themselves at the bottom of their holes since the blood of the young boys killed in combat because of their miserable provocations had flowed in torrents.

But no. This secret elite, small in number but remarkably organized, which in ten European states held, and still holds, the essential cadres of the administration, the army, the judiciary, and finance, had scarcely wavered at the moment when the soldiers who, without knowing it, had fought for it were crushed. By hundreds of thousands, the prisoners were flowing in long khaki rivers toward the camps of the Reich. And already the Masonic spiders were repairing their threads, climbing back up, agile, with hooked legs.

Marshal Pétain, a convinced Catholic but having reached senile age, caught late in life on the hook of adulation, had scarcely arrived at Vichy, and had not yet received full powers, when already the caravan chiefs of French Freemasonry were circling around him, flattering him, surrounding him, cajoling him, turning his head, malignly smothering him under heaps of wreaths. Paul-Boncour, an affected mountebank, with a wig like a cheap hairdresser's and the squat torso of a retired pimp, immediately flattened himself before the New Order, demanding on behalf of Pétain and Laval an absolute dictatorship: "All powers, I say all," he cried in July 1940 before the French National Assembly. The dinosaur-like Jeanneney, president of the Senate, an immovable, yellowed dotard, piddling onto his socks, assured the Marshal of his "gratitude" and his "veneration," proclaimed the "nobility of his soul!" Herriot, another lodge-man, came to the rescue. An enormous tripe-seller who had swallowed his merchandise, with a feather-bed belly, a nose widened by laborious excavations, he was before the war--and remained after the war--the magus of democratic mediocrity. With the vulgarity of a tavern-keeper, his head emerging from his coat like a cauliflower, he was always the Republic: a heavy-footed Republic, smoking a pipe, scratching its calves, and wearing neckties mounted on a celluloid appliance. He too, at Vichy, gave his tremolos: "Around Marshal Pétain," he exclaimed, "in the veneration that his name inspires in all, our nation has gathered in its distress."

Later, the French falconers of Freemasonry would demand, stamping their feet, the head of the old Marshal, so "venerated" at Vichy by the venerables. But after the flattening of the democracies in 1940, the Masonic watchword had been to slip in everywhere in the New Order. In France and elsewhere. The first two personalities who invited me to their homes, in August 1940, were two of the highest figures of Belgian Freemasonry: the Minister of State Devèze and the Minister of State Lippens.

The rumor was running insistently in Brussels that I was soon to be summoned by the Führer.

This rumor corresponded to real soundings. I had returned to Paris with my wife in order to buy some antique furniture--my antiquomania is well known, and it is incurable--which would repopulate our pillaged house. Otto Abetz had kept me for a long time at the embassy on the rue de Lille. He had informed me of certain intentions of which his Foreign Minister, M. von Ribbentrop, had spoken to him.

The interview that I had had with Hitler in September 1936--I may be forgiven for saying so myself--had made a considerable impression on the head of the Third Reich. It is embarrassing for me to mention it. But his reaction then alone explains why Hitler, in August 1940, imagined, on the basis of that contact dating back four years, a settlement of the Western problem. Hitler was a man of intuitions, and knew that intuition does not deceive. It allows you, in a thousandth of a second, to take an X-ray of your interlocutor's subconscious. Immediately after I left him, Hitler had said to Ribbentrop: "Never have I seen such gifts in a boy of that age." This judgment passed on me by the Führer was known to his entourage: Pierre Daye, Abetz, and ten others had heard Ribbentrop report it. A few days before the final crushing of Berlin, in April 1945, Ribbentrop, taking leave of me near the gaping Chancellery, would recall these words of his chief to me once again, not without emotion, though he was such a dry man.

Hitler, then, in August 1940, had remembered our interview. Despite my fierce struggle for Belgian neutrality, a struggle that had irritated numerous personalities beyond the Rhine, he, for his part, held to his diagnosis of 1936.

An interview was being prepared. Indiscretions coming from various circles quickly ran through Paris and Brussels. The Masonic leaders had picked up the rumor and had believed it.

I was first invited by Devèze senior, who received me at his home, flanked by Devèze junior, around a table loaded with numerous plates of biscuits and the traditional silver teapot.

I had met the elder Devèze only from time to time. He was almost my neighbor in Parliament, a well-bred colleague, not disdainful, concerned above all with the elegance of his blue suits. It cannot be said that he was an eagle; his head flattened as though his skull had been caught under the floor of an elevator, his eye clear but empty, nervous, full of tics, he was voluble but, intellectually, completely ordinary. His articles and speeches, which he chopped up comically as if his jaws served as a straw-cutter, never crossed the barrier of commonplaces. Freemasonry had made his fortune. It had given him everything except intelligence, which only God dispenses up to the present. Now God, it was visible, had settled the Devèze case on a bad day and had not indulged in excessive generosity.

Yet Devèze's banality did not stand out in society, in Parliament, or in the Liberal Party. Only men of value clash with their surroundings, irritate, and polarize animosities. Devèze really had nothing with which to offend the envious: he was an average man, average in everything, short of mind, but courteous and polished.

He had passed from Masonry to politics, from politics to business--subterranean business, as is fitting for a lodge-man, but honestly and necessarily subterranean since it concerned coal mines! Money had stabilized this immutable mediocrity. Devèze had become, like Carton de Wiart on the right, one of the candelabra of the regime, a candelabrum that illuminated nothing but to which people had grown accustomed and which definitively belonged to the décor.

Devèze junior bore, archangelically, the first name Michel. He was kind but plainly catastrophic. He had been elected deputy like his father: Freemasonry is hereditary in the obligations it implies and in the rewards to which it gives the right. He resembled a little shiny mole, with round brown eyes. His Jewish ancestry was characteristic: hooked nose, swarthy complexion, sly appearance. But the Jew generally has an alert mind. Devèze junior was neither active nor passive. He did not exist. He would not have harmed an aphid. In the Chamber, he sat for hours, his brain laborious, as applied as if he were

copying out a punishment exercise. Two or three times he stammered out a speech, written in advance, on the roundness of the paving stones of Thuin, his electoral fief, and on the length and color of cows' udders in the neighboring regions. Nothingness. A nothingness that did not try to bluff. He was modest. No one held it against him. He had been born like that. It was not his fault.

We nibbled biscuits for two hours. I found it rather rich that Devèze senior, professional flag-waver who had made the national flag the parachute of all his electoral and ministerial landings, should receive me with such warmth when, three months earlier, his co-religionists of the Palais de Justice, the Lodges, and the Liberal Party--the Jansons, the Denises, the Ganshofs--had locked me up in Saint-Gilles prison like the lowest renegade or pickpocket.

Devèze smiled at me, multiplied his tics, personally offered me, every three minutes, tea, sugar, milk, or lemon. Obviously, like all the others, he knew very well what to think of the low blow of 10 May. He would not have invited me under his roof, I imagine, if he had conceived the slightest doubt about my loyalty as a citizen. I asked him how he and the others had allowed such an outrage to be perpetrated without breathing a word. He answered by praising my patriotic lucidity, explaining that he had been mobilized on 10 May, and vomiting up Janson, Ganshof, and company. He crunched their honor nervously, as he crunched his dry biscuits.

I had the very clear impression that Devèze's amiabilities aimed further than a simple contact. One felt him prepared for agreements of a broad scope. And when he envisaged teamwork between us, his voice gained assurance.

The near future would show me that Devèze spoke, proposed, and compromised himself only because he knew he was being borne along by an overall plan that people in high places hoped to have me accept.

After Devèze, it was Lippens who invited me: much more important, that one, from every point of view: handler of money, tamer of men, of international class, hard in command, very lofty, realistic, a man of achievement.

He had once had the monumental build of a porter. With age, he had sagged and taken on the appearance of an enormous seal that has had worries and has melted inside its light-colored suit. He kept the square jaw, the vigorous eye, though strangely faded. His skin was as thick as wrapping cardboard, cracked like the skin of an old muddy crocodile that has dried for a long time in the sun.

A remarkably skillful man, he had amassed an enormous fortune by buying and developing the coastline of Le Zoute, anchoring King Léopold III there, while not forgetting--Freemason though he was--to build in his super-chic seaside town a charming Romanesque church, preceded by an open-air cloister with simple white galleries. On Sundays, hundreds of marvelous girls, smelling sweetly of salt, offered to the sun of the God of Beauty their warm bronzed shoulders. Over them poured the honeyed eloquence of Father Rutten, Count Lippens's colleague in the Senate. The Freemason had paid for the chapel. The successful Dominican raised the price of the building lots.

Lippens, the accomplished type of the politico-financial magnate, had seated his impressive rear end in some thirty boardroom chairs. He had been a minister, a minister who thought big, who made himself obeyed in his offices, abrupt, haughty, a Junker transplanted from East Prussia to the North Sea.

I had examined him closely only once, in a railway compartment that he had completely submerged by

pouring into it a pyramid of dazzling pigskin suitcases, vast as cello crates, and an entire shop's worth of golf clubs.

I received a warm letter from Lippens. He urgently invited me to come to his home. If I wished, he would come to my house himself. I did not forget that he was my elder by about forty years. I therefore went to the house he inhabited at the corner of a delightful little Flemish enclave. As a man of very sure taste, he had had it built facing the lawns, the counter-terraces, and the pointed bell tower of the old Abbey of La Cambre, at the entrance to the Bois.

Lippens went straight to the point. For him, political democracy, which he had always detested--and that was true, for he had the temperament of a boyar--was done for, finished. There was no going back on that. It was necessary to rebuild according to ideas that had just proved their strength.

He had always been a partisan of restoring the authority of the State. He had always hated and despised the parliamentary fairground. He was not lying when he made this declaration to me. No one was farther removed from the hundred-headed stupidity of shouting parliaments than this born squire, monocle in his eye, decisive, accustomed to command and to assume his responsibilities alone.

Old, but still very vigorous, he burned to return to the track. Democracy would no longer have opened its doors to this dictatorial little nobleman who did not know how to hide his arrogance before the commoners. The break of 1940 offered him an unhoped-for opportunity to play a role again. He had been the very first in Brussels to fraternize with General von Falkenhausen. He had good German friends and spoke German. Since the end of May, he had been very active.

Renouncing without remorse a regime from which he was politically excluded, he laid his cards on the table and offered that he and his little group should team up with Rex and with the Flemish nationalist leaders.

He, like so many others, was ready to work with the V.N.V., despite the extraordinary campaigns that it was then waging in its meetings and in its newspaper Volk en Staat against a Belgian State which, all the same, had made Lippens a count, a Minister of State, and a money potentate!

I did not see, in Brussels, throughout the end of the summer and the autumn of 1940, a single politician from the old parties or a single man of finance who expressed any reservation about the V.N.V. For all of them, with Lippens at their head, the patriotic orthodoxy of their future allies mattered no more than it did for the flattened crowds who assailed the Flemish nationalist leaders with flatteries and supplications.

Lippens asked no one whether his conduct had been honest before 10 May 1940. We might really have been traitors, traitors whom events had served. And we were coming out of prison, which in those days was not yet a reference! Lippens might at least have said to the leaders of the V.N.V. and said to me: "Question of conception of regime and political ideas aside, can you give me your word that your attitude before 10 May was correct, that you were neither an agent nor an accomplice of the invader?"

It would have been normal for such a question to be put to us. And I add that we would have been happy to answer it.

But no! No such request was made to us. They threw themselves into our arms, straightaway! It was not we who were asking for the friendship of a Lippens. It was he who was inviting, he who was

offering, who was offering to the V.N.V. the most eager collaboration!

Personally, I was convinced that, with the leaders of the V.N.V.--decent men temporarily thrown off course by success, but fiercely attached to their people and their soil, which is patriotism--solutions of wisdom would one day be possible. I believed in their good sense because I had known them for a very long time. But Lippens and his followers, what did they know of Staf De Clerq, of Elias, of Gérard Romsée, with whom until then they had perhaps never exchanged a word? What did they know of me?

They stretched out their hands, wide open, toward our hands, and above all toward the ministerial portfolios that they believed they could reach only by attaching their last ambitions to our youthful forces rising to the assault on a world.

During our interview, Lippens had deployed all his seductiveness as a driver of men, as a company chief. I had detected his qualities and, of course, also his extreme desire for power. But I had not committed myself.

I had time. The Germans had not moved. It was for them to take the first step, since they were in Belgium without having been invited there. Militarily, they were victors. Politically, we remained masters of our decisions.

To go around the offices of the Militärverwaltung, to palaver, to propose, was to weaken our chances. I had made approaches to no one.

With regard to Berlin, I had practiced the same reserve. I had written nothing. I had asked for nothing. I had asked for nothing to be requested. I had conceived a grandiose plan to regroup our old Burgundian Low Countries, an imperial plan on the scale of a Charles V. My project could pass only through the great door. I was waiting for it to be opened. Little jobs did not interest me. In that case, I preferred to look at my roses, my old atlases, or to play on the lawns of the park with my children.

Nothing, therefore, was urgent when Lippens had so warmly proposed that we unite in a brain trust of reformers. I had left him very interested in the man, and a little more enlightened than I already was on the amorality of the political function. But I had promised nothing. Lippens, burning up the pavement, pursued me by letter. Even now I cannot understand how that intelligent man could write to me with such phenomenal lightness. Political ambition really had to be devouring him. He had spoken to me only once. I had committed myself to absolutely nothing. And he proposed to me in writing not only that we should form a bloc to get the State machine out of trouble, but that his club and I should collaborate in preparing a prompt and radical transformation of the Belgian Constitution.

I reread the letter ten times before believing it. The proposal was as formal as could be.

Not only did Lippens urgently invite me to this upheaval of the Constitution, but he gave me the names of some ten personalities from all sides, a veritable ministry before the letter, who, sounded out by him, were ready to begin work immediately in my company!

This direct proposal from Count Lippens had not answered solely the push of personal ambition of an old retired boa, eager to deploy his coils again in the political bush.

The Minister of State had written to me in this way only after having gathered twice, on 20 and 27 August 1940, and brought to a precise agreement, the personalities of the old regime who, paired with

Rex and the V.N.V., were to prepare the substitution of New Order institutions for democratic-constitutional institutions.

These gentlemen, after declaring themselves in agreement to team up with the Rexists and the Flemish nationalists, pushed their zeal so far as to give birth to an official procès-verbal, read and approved, in which, summarizing their positions, they proclaimed that "the conception of democracy was outdated" and that it was necessary "to appeal to the V.N.V. and to the Rexists, to Messrs. Elias and Degrelle"!

Among these intrepid candidates for the upheaval of the regime and for concubinage with victorious "Fascism" were the former Christian Democratic minister Paul Tschoffen and the highest magistrates of the country, the procureur général at the Court of Cassation Cornil and the advocate general at the Court of Cassation Hayoit de Termicourt, not to mention the future secretary of Prince Charles, regent of "liberated" Belgium in 1944, the man named De Staercke.

I am not trying here to crush anyone. I say what is. I reveal what a Minister of State--Lippens--wrote to me in full letters, what was accepted, then calmly confirmed in an official report, by the No. 1 leader of Christian democracy, Tschoffen, and--supreme irony!--by the very chiefs of a Justice that had flung me into prison as an enemy of the Belgian State one hundred days earlier!

All approved the procès-verbal of which I have just spoken. Neither Lippens, nor Tschoffen, nor the wriggling magistrates of the brain trust felt the slightest scruple, either regarding the legality of the projected operation of jointly tinkering with Belgian institutions, or regarding the past of the guests invited to the party, or regarding the frankly anti-Belgian attitude then displayed by the V.N.V., invited, at the same time as myself, to this extraordinary fraternization.

I did not accept the proposal of the Lippens committee, because I found it odd to lose weeks or months giving birth to solemn paper-work on reform of the State at the very moment when the country was above all demanding order, work, and reasons not to lose courage.

I had no fetishism for the Constitution, an old streetwalker violated a hundred times. It had in fact been annulled by the democratic regime itself during the unconstitutional arrests of 10 May 1940.

But, however outdated it was, it nevertheless remained usable, at least as a screen, especially in wartime. Simply putting it in the shade could allow the governors broadly to expand--forms having been preserved--their experiments and field of action.

For the time being, one had to be content with the old stage sets abandoned by the stage managers of the old regime and without delay put life on the boards. One had to spend oneself fully, succeed, create in public opinion a powerful current and, basing oneself on it, cast into the form of laws, later, when the opportunity was favorable and with the clearly expressed approval and support of the nation, the results of an experiment brought to a successful conclusion in a dynamic manner. I too wanted to build something new, but something new first passed through the revealing fire of action and verified by the will of the people.

Count Lippens did not lose heart. He knew that, without the support of Rex and the V.N.V., his chances of returning to the shores of politics were nil. Tenacious as an old alligator, he continued to lie in wait for power, eye on the watch, level with the water.

He had finally understood that he had to leave me alone with his projects for reform of the State. But he

never missed an opportunity to pursue me, to flatter me, to show me a vibrant sympathy, hoping that we would nevertheless end by sticking together in one way or another. After the Rexist daily Le Pays réel had reappeared, he wrote me the most enthusiastic letter of congratulations that I received at the time, submerging me in dithyrambic flatteries. He himself came through the Forêt de Soignes to bring this missive to my house, making an entire speech to the caretaker in order to be quite sure that his courtier-like note would be placed in my own hands!

One may wonder how great Masonic bigwigs like the Lippenses, the Cornils, the Devèzes could imagine that they would be part of a so-called "New Order" government when, in the name of the New Order, the Germans were organizing violently aggressive exhibitions to brand Freemasonry with a hot iron.

The question is more complex than it appears. If official German propaganda was going all-out against the sect of Messrs. Lippens, Devèze, Cornil and company, other Germans, still morally bound to international Freemasonry, supported behind the scenes the ambitious efforts and recovery exercises of their former foreign colleagues.

The German embassy in Brussels was the center of these intrigues. Lippens had both small and great entrances there.

During my leave from the Caucasus front, at the beginning of 1943, I was, for the first time, invited to dinner by the Reich ambassador in Brussels, the man named von Bargen. It was an evening of crushing boredom. Old generals with washed-out jowls. Singers with stork-like shinbones, with the skin of their necks stretched over elastics, with sad shoulder blades protruding. Honorable ruddy matrons, with massive behinds, dropping in one block like sacks of grain. The Ambassador was a sly man, with the grey skin of a rat that has lost its fur, with a furtive look, with a round back like the spine of a dog that has stolen a bone and senses that it is being watched. I detested him. He knew it. His underground campaigns in favor of the crab-spiders of the old regime were known to me. I said to him abruptly, my eyes searching his little blinking eyes: "How, when Germany is conducting a violent campaign against Freemasonry, how can you, ambassador of the Reich, be the manager of the Freemason Lippens?"

He recoiled. Taken short, he let slip: "But I too, before the war, was a Freemason!"

That day, truly, I understood what the Masonic international was!

If the German Freemasons supported Lippens, other supports, on the national terrain, were not denied him.

Just like Devèze--who had been received personally by Léopold III after the capitulation, although he was a politician--Lippens was, I knew, persona grata at the Palace of Laeken. In 1940, Lippens wrote up to three times a week to the King's Cabinet. This correspondence has remained largely unpublished. And it is not the only correspondence to have been mislaid by powerful conjurers! That is a pity. But the tone of what has been published (cum permiso superiorum) has allowed the public to judge with what arrogance Lippens made his way of thinking known to the King's most immediate collaborators.

He did not fear resorting to barely veiled blackmail in order to precipitate the royal decisions that he awaited with feverish impatience: "I believe it my duty to inform you," he wrote to the head of Léopold III's Cabinet on 10 July 1940, "of what I learned today from a sure source: that the withdrawal of the foreign diplomats from Brussels was a German reprisal measure, the Germans being very dissatisfied

that the Belgians are not forming a government and, consequently, want to ignore the Germans!"

This interpretation was grotesque. In July 1940, the Germans had an interest--since no tendency was clear and I myself was missing--in letting the Belgian political fruit ripen; absolutely nothing then allowed one to believe that they were dissatisfied with this stagnation, which was, on the contrary, favorable to separatist and annexationist aims advocated by certain bigwigs in Berlin. In no way could the departure of the diplomats from Brussels have been ordered as a "measure of reprisal." Lippens had learned absolutely nothing of the kind, from either a "sure source" or an uncertain source. He invented these "confidences" from whole cloth in order to impress the Palace and to attribute the royal cake to himself.

At that moment, I was still being taken for dead. The more quickly the Palace decided, the more quickly Lippens and his panting following would have chances of being served.

Lippens's proposals often overlapped. He imperiously demanded the formation of a government. Then, the same morning, he proposed that a Council of State be constituted, which was something entirely different and plainly extra-constitutional. Then he dreamed up yet something else that might harmonize his hunger for power and the political impotence of the King, momentarily a prisoner.

Yet there existed, pending the more or less near day when the King would resume his functions as head of State, a solution a hundred times less complicated than all these plans. It was not indispensable for Léopold III to commit himself immediately and publicly by an official act. When the Sovereign had seen Hitler--his sister Marie-José was diligently occupied in preparing an interview--there would still be time to envisage the establishment of a government created according to all the academic decorum. Before that, it was childish to emerge from anarchy by administrative means, no more, by appointing by co-optation, one by one, over a few weeks, with the King's silent agreement, new secretaries general chosen among the most qualified representatives of the new political tendencies. Functionaries working in the half-light but already essential in ordinary times, permanent elements of the State amid political agitation, the backbone of the administration, the Belgian secretaries general had in fact held the power of ministers since the latter had fled abroad, long before the capitulation in Flanders.

Promoted to these functions following a simple election within the college, the political men thus chosen would therefore have been ministers in fact, without any kind of hobble on the fetlock.

This provisional arrangement, which respected the Constitution and allowed one to set to work without delay, was the solution that I advocated from the first day. Thus the King did not commit himself officially, and governmental succession took place without shock, without noise, in the most scrupulous legality.

Already the appointment of the leader of the Flemish nationalists, Gérard Romsée, as secretary general of the Ministry of the Interior had proved that these little Trojan horses could be introduced very easily. Belgium would thus rapidly have possessed a real government, without useless finery, discreetly and firmly holding the country in hand and breathing into it a renovating spirit. Léopold III would have had time to maneuver and to obtain lasting guarantees from Hitler before putting his prestige and his authority on the New Order table.

Lippens, proud, bitten by splendid memories, would have preferred a more spectacular arrival in power, while I, despite my plans for grandeur and my concern for the prestige of the State, would have been satisfied with an unostentatious slide toward de facto power, toward those administrative levers of

command that we would have handled with ten times more effectiveness than the titled ministers of before the war, slaves of Parliament and the parties.

This coup d'État on the sly would legally have assured us everything. The rest would have come in addition. When? That mattered little. The essential thing was that we should be--and we would have been--masters of the State.

There remained the questions of persons. Since the Palace was attached to it, I could have accommodated myself to a Lippens, to a Devèze, at the beginning at least. A dish à la Hugenberg or à la von Papen, even tough, even out of season, was digestible for young and vigorous stomachs like ours.

Lippens, despite his mug of an old toothless lion, still represented a real value. He could have been used at Transport, or Reconstruction, or Public Instruction. Even Devèze--not intelligent, but skillful, insinuating--could have been entrusted with a minor portfolio. The whole thing would have been to stick on both of them a young, reliable, sharp, hard-working chef de cabinet, keeping his eye open and having the social sense that these two fossils totally lacked.

Devèze and Lippens would usefully have covered us, at the beginning, on the side of the bourgeoisie of the left and the money forces, which it was impossible to bring into line in a single day. The wishes, easily detectable, of the high dignitaries of Laeken were therefore satisfiable, even if, in bitterly advising the King, the most ardent thurifers of the two liberal Ministers of State dreamed of possessing us at the first turn and thought more of the future of the Lodges than of the future of the fatherland.

At the head of the Freemasonic "kommando" of the Palace was fencing the King's principal collaborator, Baron Frédéricq, twenty-ninth degree of a Ghent lodge.

Lippens treated him from very high up, calling him in his letters "my dear Frédéricq" while he himself signed "Count Lippens," as if the Frédéricq in question had been the manager of one of his farms.

Lippens, believing that the Palace was everything, went too far. To Élias, to Henri de Man, to me, he spoke of a common team, but without ever specifying who would be the head of the common team. What was he still, he, Lippens? He was no more than himself, without party, without troops, apart from his half-dozen cancelled politicians and magistrates ready for the grand-ducal outing. Nevertheless, in his pride as an insatiable old crocodilian, Lippens firmly counted on becoming the arbiter of the situation on the great day when the New Order would install itself in power.

Still it was necessary--it was a minimum--that the Palace push him forward officially as the possible head of such a team.

Lippens achieved his ends. The siege of the King was carried on without respite by the Masonic dignitaries of the Palace, and the King let slip, on 19 November 1940, to Hitler, the name of the millionaire developer of Le Zoute.

I learned it with stupefaction when I was later shown the authentic report of the Berchtesgaden interview.

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X

SOCIALIST COLLABORATION

Henri de Man's volte-face. - De Man and Hitlerism before the war. - The miraculous farce of the Plan. - When de Man was minister. - Sniggering at the democratic altar. - The liquidation of the P.O.B. in June 1940. - All the mandarins behind de Man. - The ideal of socialist youth. - De Man and his newspapers. - Henri de Man's immunity in 1945. - Spaak silent. - The reason for this silence.

Henri de Man, president of the Belgian Workers' Party (P.O.B.), was also reputed to be a Freemason. He did not deny it. He did not admit it. This man rarely denied or admitted anything. He was a taciturn man, brick-colored in complexion, with the mischievous eyes of a village priest, observant and shrewd. A stranger to vanity, content anywhere with his pipe and his fishing rod, he was unquestionably one of the most notable figures of European socialism between the wars.

His sensational move in the summer of 1940 was not ordinary. Leopold III's army had scarcely capitulated near the North Sea when he, the acting president of the Belgian Socialist Party, minister of state and superior officer attached to the King, issued a proclamation immediately suppressing his own party, rejoicing in the German victory, and proclaiming his faith in National Socialism as the liberator of Europe!

As in a department-store liquidation sale, de Man was dumping everything: the P.O.B., the party's Executive Bureau, the newspapers, the buildings! There was no longer any salvation for a Belgian proletarian except by becoming a National Socialist!

I remember my amazement when the guard who brought me my pittance in my cell at Puy-en-Velay announced to me, one fine midday, that de Man had become prime minister in Brussels! I, the supposed Hitlerian, was in the block! But de Man, leader until May 28, 1940, of the most powerful anti-Hitler party in Belgium, was forming a government seen and approved by Hitler!

This was in fact inaccurate. De Man was still nothing at all. But he had sent his party to the devil, was singing the glory of totalitarian ideas, and was maneuvering, from morning to evening, from the royal palace of Laeken to the offices of the Reich embassy and the Militarverwaltung.

How is his volte-face to be explained? Had he secretly become, before May 10, the Belgian agent of the Third Reich?

It was whispered that it was because of him that the King had capitulated: "De Man had not left him for an instant during those dramatic days; he had arranged everything."

That Henri de Man's role with Leopold III was important at the end of May 1940, that it was even capital, admits not the shadow of a doubt. The King was at the end of his nerves. De Man himself later told me in what state of dejection Leopold III then found himself, passing from exaltation to prostration, weeping, his face haggard, his hair disordered. De Man added: "The physical portrait Spaak drew of him at Limoges is rigorously exact."

Such disarray was understandable. This moral crisis was a terrible crisis for the King: he was militarily

cornered, politically abandoned. Only a cold observer in the de Man style, leaning over defeat with a clinician's insensibility, could keep a marble calm amid this tornado and observe the King's distress with the detached eye of a chronicler. He had advised Leopold III, and had moreover advised him well. Capitulation was, militarily, the only solution. If the fighting had continued two days more, it would have led uselessly to a frightful massacre.

But this intervention by Henri de Man had been independent of any pressure whatsoever from the Reich.

It was the same with his famous proclamation, on the morrow of Hitler's victory.

Did de Man or did he not wish, in the summer of 1940, to give this text the resounding circulation it achieved? Since the war, he has imputed responsibility for this loudly publicized publication to the untimely zeal of one of his militants. That is possible, although it must be acknowledged that in 1940 de Man never gave anyone such a version of the facts. On the contrary, he bore the responsibility for his text quite jauntily. Besides, what is the point of this debate over the sex of angels? Was the text written by de Man, yes or no? Yes, from the first capital letter to the final period. Well then...

De Man had ensured such private distribution for his message, through endlessly mimeographed copies, that its reproduction in the major press had to follow automatically from this personal propaganda. He offered it to everyone as a young poet foists his first little book of verse on each of his acquaintances.

Obviously, the text was loaded: "Do not believe that one must resist the occupier; accept the fact of his victory. This collapse of a decrepit world, far from being a disaster, is a deliverance!"

It is clear that no one in Europe in 1940 published such categorical assertions, not even Mussert, not even Quisling.

But it is also clear that de Man wrote these apothegms with absolute sincerity. His good faith is beyond doubt for all those who knew his honesty and his absence of personal ambition. He spoke thus because a great hope had arisen in him at that time: "Peace," he wrote, "could not come out of the free agreement of sovereign nations and rival imperialisms: it may come out of a Europe unified by arms, where economic frontiers have been leveled."

The invader would be the unifier. Indisputably, these texts were stiff, especially written so soon after the debacle, by the head of the principal party swept away by the invasion and by a superior officer of the defeated army. That a former minister who, a few weeks earlier, still presided over the most powerful anti-Hitler party in Belgium should proclaim that the fact of Hitler's victory had to be accepted with relief; that a major of the Belgian army should affirm that the military defeat of his country constituted a deliverance: this was astounding. But one must have the courage to fix, without evasions, each man's responsibilities. Well, if anyone ought in 1940 to have been scandalized, in the event that these words were scandalous, who was it, if not the King, who had Henri de Man directly under his orders? Did Leopold III, after the drafting of this appeal, suspend de Man, an officer attached to him? Did he close his door to him? Yes? No?

Everyone knows perfectly well that Major Henri de Man, provided, at the King's own request, with a German authorization to enter the Château of Laeken day and night, continued to go to the Sovereign's palace three times a week throughout the summer that followed the publication of the famous equation:

Hitler's victory = deliverance of the Belgians!

That is how it was! In spite of this Hitlerophile proclamation, de Man remained, more than ever, the King's personal friend and confidant. He was, certainly, demobilized during the year 1940, thereby ceasing officially to be an "officer attached to the King," but this demobilization changed nothing in the relations that existed between the King and the former president of the Socialist Party. De Man was so much at home at Laeken that he called by their first names (Louis) the Sovereign's valet and (Jeanne) Queen Elisabeth's chambermaid! He drove -- alone in this case, apart from the Monarch's immediate circle -- in a car bearing the official German plate "KGL Hofstab," that is to say, "Royal Staff."

After the publication of this famous message, he was charged by the Sovereign with exploratory approaches to an eminent personality of the Third Reich, just as in 1939 he had already been Leopold III's secret envoy to Rome and Berlin.

If, in intoning the paean to celebrate the "disaster-deliverance" brought by Hitler, Henri de Man committed a crime, it is patent that the King covered that crime, as did all the Lippenses, Ganshof van der Meerschs and their like, who for a long time scampered around Henri de Man to receive their share of the "victory-deliverance"!

At least he, de Man, believed what he said. He was really animated by the hope that a more united and more just Europe would arise "from the collapse of a decrepit world."

That hope was disappointed in part because of the blunders of German policy. But this hope was proud, it was clean, much prouder and cleaner than the courtier's zeal of the thousands of office-seekers and graspers who, by gluing themselves to de Man, selfishly dreamed only of new sinecures or ministerial portfolios.

Above all, one should not imagine that in 1940 de Man had turned his coat like some Spaak, simply because external circumstances had changed.

Nor had de Man -- like Paul on the road to Damascus -- received, on May 28, 1940, on the road to Wynendaele, a thunderbolt illumination.

A theorist with a mind always on the alert, he was the very opposite of a man carried away by impulse. His position had been taken abruptly, but it had by no means been caused by the military defeat of May 1940. Unconsciously, the National Socialist phenomenon -- a universal phenomenon -- had long been working on him.

Hitlerism had treated him quite badly at its beginning. A professor at the University of Frankfurt, de Man had been driven from his chair and expelled from Germany in 1933. His books had been burned on the public squares of the Reich. His curiosity was not slowed for so little. De Man was a strange man, who attached no importance to partisan brawls or incidents of a material order. The trajectory of a political idea held his attention far more than the boot-kicks of a praetorian.

Back in Brussels, he dug into everything in detail, but on the scale of the absolute. To this detachment he added an astonishing fantasy, an amused taste for intellectual scandal, a sadistic joy in stupefying rank-and-file militants, in overturning, before their horrified eyes, the pontiffs and the clichés. Old Vandervelde in particular, the founder, the ancestor of the P.O.B., a rather decayed diplodocus in 1936, deaf as a post, but a relic all the same, had been jostled and tossed aside by de Man, his former protégé,

with a casualness very close to contempt and practical joking. Thus freed from all sentimentalism, de Man had studied the evolution of German National Socialism without the slightest prejudice, as he would have studied the evolution of Tory doctrine or the republicanism of M. Thiers.

De Man associated with Germans in Brussels before the war, as Spaak associated with Germans, as their small Catholic-socialist group associated with Germans -- sentimental Germans gathered around a young painter whose name would one day make noise, but outside painting: Otto Abetz. The latter came to Brussels from time to time and was received by a rather odd coterie of socialist and Catholic ephebes, anxious and smoky, of young women moved in their nerves, of theorists interested in every new tendency. They talked interminably of a new Europe, captivating, unreal as a dream.

Alone in the group, Spaak was bourgeoisly balanced, a good fat Brusseleer whose hundred kilos were healthily stabilizing. He was simply trying to establish a few useful relations with young men from a country from which everything then separated him. But the others came as chilled catechumens, as they would have gone to a séance of initiation, where spirits are evoked, where oracles are awaited.

This Belgo-German group was limited, recruited almost entirely among the young theorists, comfortably paid, of the Spaak-de Man-van Zeeland school. Of our friends, only José Streel had taken part, from time to time, in these academic discussions. One day he was charged with inviting me to the home of the beautiful Egeria who opened her salons to these debates. The new Europe appeared to me on that occasion under a rather unexpected and extremely pleasant aspect. At the center of a boudoir in muted colors, the young and ravishing inspirer of these exchanges of views was stretched out on a sumptuous lion skin, Eve beneath a fragile flowered dress.

The husband did not attend these rites. He was an excellent man, polite, harmless, and extravagant, who served Europe in gestation by walking his dogs on Avenue Louise: long, well-bred greyhounds, undulating, with fine and nervous loins like those of their poetic mistress.

I do not believe that very terrible conspiracies against state security were prepared at the feet of this electric goddess. A Europe seen through her had to be full of attraction.

All this was poetry. At that moment I had other concerns than to sit at the feet of a beast's pelt, however laden with lyricism it might be. And I never again returned to that attractive beauty in flowers.

De Man, however, visited this harmonious garden of Europe fairly regularly. There he met Dr. Liebe, Otto Abetz's delegate in Belgium. But these political capers had relatively little to do, I imagine, with the doctrinal evolution of the incisive president of the P.O.B.

De Man was a National Socialist on May 28, 1940, because he had been one before May 28, 1940. He was so to the marrow of his bones: a born antiparliamentarian, a ferocious and barely camouflaged contemner of democratic institutions, and, on the other hand, a resolute supporter of a very energetic social supervision by the state.

It required the naïveté of the crowds and above all the crushing primariness of the socialist leaders for Henri de Man, in 1935, to have been made the democratic reformer of the P.O.B., the mage who, reviving the old mummies under their bandages, would bring a doctrine, a plan, a miracle that would set everything right, arrange everything.

I lay it down as a principle that never did a socialist militant know what de Man was proposing. He had

published his famous "Plan" in a volume of six hundred pages, written in German, translated from German into French under the title L'Idée socialiste. It was not a book, it was a brick, an enormous brick. No one read this book to the end: after an hour he would have fallen dead. It was an economico-philosophical mishmash, heavy as lead, written in a jargon that was no longer German and had not become French. The sentences were endless. The words had not a glimmer. As for the meaning of the work, dark as a moonless thicket, one had honestly to give up trying to grasp it. This gibberish gave one a migraine. It did not put one to sleep; it stunned one.

I held a hundred contradictory meetings on de Man's Plan. Each time I challenged the socialist speaker to swear that he had read the book. Each time the other man stammered, and the debate ended in hubbub and laughter.

I have always secretly felt a deep admiration for de Man, because he had written that book and survived. It was beyond me. That exploit was the exploit of a superman.

They tried to break the "brick" into pieces and retail it in brochures, clearly printed, with art. The brick, even crumbled, remained indigestible.

What could the stone-breaker, the wheelwright, the chain-maker, after their hard day's work was done, the exhausted furnace worker returning from the blast furnaces, the miner coming back up from the pit, possibly draw from this amphigory?

Never in my life have I witnessed such an enterprise of intellectual mystification. Hundreds of thousands of francs of workers' savings were wasted covering the country with posters: The Plan. The whole Plan. Nothing but the Plan! Banners -- The Plan. The whole Plan. Nothing but the Plan! -- spanned the main roads in every industrial locality. But if you asked what the Plan was, what there was inside it, people looked at you with questioning eyes, turning their caps in their hands.

This word had been stuffed into the people's head. Plan! It was only a word. One of those words that the people repeated with its touching good will, with its so pure need to place its trust in something, in someone.

A fraud of one repeated, imposed syllable. An unconscious fraud among many worthy militants, simpletons thrown into confusion by the deification of knowledge, synonymous, for them, with the obscure.

The masses, with their limitless admiration for science, admired the Plan exactly to the extent that they could not decipher it. "If it is so hard to understand, it must be terribly strong!" They looked at the book respectfully, as they would have looked at an X-ray machine, an iron lung, or a calculating brain.

De Man, moreover, was not trying to mystify. There is nothing more dreadfully sincere than a theorist. If, before being printed, the product of their cogitations were brought into contact with the facts, inventors of systems would no doubt be less sure of their formulas, for there would have been failures; they would have seen the necessity of undertaking numerous modifications, revisions, simplifications. But de Man is a "professor"; he believes one draws up a political plan as one draws up the plan of a dynamo. Once the plan is drawn, all that remains is to manufacture and assemble the parts. But the Plan was always unsuited to any incarnation. Never did anyone seriously try to apply a chapter, a page, a line of it.

The socialist public had understood nothing. The militants splashed about in jargon and darkness and lost themselves in the tunnel. This publicity served only to give de Man, in that milieu of elementary minds and illiterates, the reputation that made his fortune for five years: "He is a brain!"

And the "brain" was placed at the head of the P.O.B., while the old mandarin Vandervelde, dethroned, unbolted, rolled amid the piles of brochures and six-hundred-page books, uncut and unsalable.

A very clever man would have been needed in 1937 to say whether de Man, elected after this mystification to the presidency of the P.O.B., was still a "democrat" or not!

He had become a minister and formed a strange tandem with Spaak: Spaak, common sense and opportunism, gliding through ministerial waters like a large satisfied carp; de Man, with a jaw hard as a pike's, waiting, hidden in the lianas, for the hour of the bite, passing through the current like lightning, rushing toward his prey.

He quickly acquired the reputation of a disagreeable fellow, sending van Zeeland, his prime minister, head over heels with a diabolical trip that brought the National Bank scandal to a peremptory close in 1937.

No real current of personal sympathy for de Man had ever been noticed among the crowds of the P.O.B. The people had been impressed by the prophet's smoky books. But they had felt no psychological shock.

"He is somebody," people said on doorsteps, in the workers' settlements. That was all. But his cavalier ways were beginning to irritate. De Man, terribly intelligent, soon detected the weaknesses of real democracy, the pompous stupidity of the actors swarming in the corridors of Parliament and in party conclaves. For this man of unreadable books had a ferocious gift of observation. One had to see the tip of his pointed nose quiver, the little white square of his squirrel teeth relax. From his portraits and jokes there emerged a droll ecclesiastical humor.

He was, naturally, a hundred cubits superior to the poor gray donkey-drivers of the party Central Committee and to his colleagues in the Senate, most of them decrepit, sleeping with their noses on their waistcoats in their armchairs surmounted by bellicose lions, or taking turns, with little steps, at the lavatory. Amid this mahogany hospice, de Man burst forth with youth: passionate about skiing, his complexion cooked by the snow sun, he was taken for the carefree and irreverent medical student charged with supervising the antics of gouty old gentlemen, threatened by apoplexy or tormented by the bladder.

De Man allowed himself to treat parliamentarians and all the pontiffs of this venerable religion offhandedly. People cried iconoclast. De Man, sarcastic, went as far as profanation. As minister, he had to present and defend his budget before the Senate. On the appointed day, all the catarrhal burgraves were there, quavering, one or another forgotten button shining like a discreet star. But de Man did not appear. People grew worried. In Switzerland, the snow was beautiful: suddenly, the minister had left, his skis on his shoulder, to spend a season at winter sports! The Senate suffocated. De Man returned only two weeks later, brown as toast, insulting by his clear health all those old adipose dullards, with blurred faces, like apricot tarts that had run too much in the display window.

More and more, de Man mocked democracy. Everything in this solemn menagerie seemed to him ridiculous, insane, and comic: the rites, the red-and-gold decorum, the ushers loaded with chains and

medals like chiefs of anthropophagous tribes, the commissions where everyone took knowing airs to hide his ignorance or approve banalities, incompetence erected into an article of faith, the arbitrariness of clubs, the stiff, important air assumed over everything, as if each of these nonentities had been deposited by the heavens, a particle of divinity, monologuing behind a glass of mint water. Well before September 1, 1939, it was an open secret that de Man had lost faith in the democratic religion and that he joked while saying Mass.

But the P.O.B. did not dare make a scandal, after having canonized the father of the Plan before the prostrate crowds. It was known that de Man was tough. He had had van Zeeland's hide. He had strongly infiltrated the unions and relied on them to blackmail the P.O.B.

The months of neutrality aggravated the moral rupture. De Man, head of the strongest bellicist party in Belgium, was anonymously conducting a biting campaign against the warmongers whom he officially presided over! He had created a Flemish review, Leiding, openly oriented toward totalitarian conceptions. It clung to the coattails of all the adversaries of neutrality and vigorously defended the ideas of authority and the European conciliation policy of King Leopold.

The unsigned leading articles in Leiding were Henri de Man's work. Everyone knew it. But impenetrable, taking little pulls on his eternal stubby pipe, de Man, serious as a pope, continued to preside over the party he was bombarding with red-hot shot as soon as he had left the Assembly.

This splitting of the personality was becoming a case for a detective film. The misunderstanding could not last indefinitely. On the day after the capitulation of May 1940, the anti-democratic Henri de Man liquidated the democratic Henri de Man; the president of the P.O.B. committed hara-kiri, toppled his own party without asking anyone's opinion, suppressing it purely and simply by a dictatorial stroke of the pen.

One should above all not imagine that this coup de force by Henri de Man provoked indignation or protests.

By taking sides with unheard-of coarseness against the King who had saved tens of thousands of his soldiers, encircled in western Flanders, from certain carnage, Pierlot, Spaak, and the fugitive parliamentarians had aroused general anger in Belgium. Crowds, generally speaking, do not shine by their courage. On May 27, 1940, everyone was thinking in terror of his own skin, of the skin of parents, lovers, friends. On May 28, thanks to the capitulation, these various individual skins were saved. The crowd was automatically against those who had wanted "it to continue" and with the King, and with de Man, thanks to whom the great green fear had come to an end.

It was a matter of abdominal muscles and guts. Such reactions are more powerful than principles, assuming that Spaak had for once been guided by principles and not by his opportunism.

Hitler, sweeping away one fine morning the Marxist unions of the Reich, had done no more than Henri de Man. The latter's decree dumping the socialist bric-a-brac was absorbed without blinking by the party pashas.

The liquidation of the P.O.B. was digested. Instead of being reproached, de Man was considered within his former party as a man of grip -- that was the fashion -- whose cleaver struck hard.

It is always the same thing: charge ahead, be strong, and people will follow you! People think first of

their interest, of daily food, of the little job. In June, in July 1940, hundreds of mercenaries from the defunct P.O.B. and its trade-union organizations, bourgeoisified pen-pushers but still holding strings that de Man might need, had to choose: either defend "the idea" against all comers, and be shown the door, or pass over to totalitarianism with de Man and remain, within the new organizations, the gentleman who draws a salary, controls members, and will climb in proportion as he has shown himself docile.

De Man encountered no difficulty. He created, from scratch, a trade-union machine in the German manner, establishing the single union, the UTMI (Union of Manual and Intellectual Workers). The transmission took place without a sigh. Martyrdom is a business that yields little. There were no martyrs.

De Man, more sarcastic than ever, saw rolling toward him, political and social liquidator, the crowd of bonzes, yapping, licking, rubbing themselves against him. A few, exceedingly rare exceptions, had found it more prudent to go to ground in a shadowy hole. A few others approached, yellow-faced, with a shifty eye. But nine-tenths of the militants of the former P.O.B. marched along: deputies and senators running by the dozen, three socialist ministers at their head, including the lisping "Acille" Van Acker, future head of the "resistance" government of 1945, so little troubled by the coup de force of the "traitor" de Man that he did not even swallow the hair that a merciful god had placed on his tongue in the hope that he would keep quiet, which, moreover, he did not do.

By August 1940, de Man had at his disposal the whole old trade-union machine, ready to be rebuilt according to the National Socialist model, while all the "Acille" Van Ackers of Flanders and Wallonia, hand at the trouser seam, endorsed, simpered, admired.1 If the old bosses had swallowed the toad and had rallied out of opportunism, the youth of the former P.O.B., for its part, had enthusiastically fallen into step behind the reformers.

In the course of hundreds of meetings before the war, I had had dealings with the well-led bands, hard in the clash, devilishly intolerant, of the Socialist Young Guards. They had assaulted me on various occasions, at La Hestre in 1934, at Yvoz-Ramet in 1935, had tried to shoot me down with a submachine gun at Seraing in 1936, wounding three of my comrades.

I had endured them or faced them everywhere. There were no more relentless enemies of fascism than those rough fellows. But in reality, no one was better prepared than they for the violence of the regimes they stigmatized with great reinforcements of stones and bolts.

After May 28, 1940, in eight days they were National Socialists, much more Hitlerian than Hitler, inviting our comrades throughout the country to meetings and fraternizations. During my first visits to Hainaut, they ran everywhere to meet me. We drank "demis" together while evoking old and sympathetic memories: each one, in order to enter further into my friendship, tried to claim with the greatest ostentation the honor of having formerly clubbed me with the most vigor.

1 In Cavalier seul (pp. 261 and 262), Henri de Man sarcastically evoked this time of the great crawling submission: "If I had kept a few illusions about homo politicus, I would have lost them between June and October 1940 at the spectacle of the spinelessnesses that came to exhibit themselves in my office. The normal course of things was this: a politician or trade-union official who had fled to France had put the cash holdings of his organization in safety there, generally after having deducted the amount of at least one year's salary for himself. Then, having learned by radio and whispered propaganda that 'I was well with the Germans,' he hastened back to the country. He came to assure me of his good feelings, to

explain 'by the contagion of the atmosphere' his participation in demonstrations against 'the felon king' and his political adviser, and finally to ask timidly whether there really was no danger in going home.

"I generally replied: 'I do not think so, but I advise you to keep quiet at first, the time needed to readapt yourself to the atmosphere here.' Most then asked me to intervene so that they could return to their posts as burgomasters, aldermen, local or regional officeholders. I perhaps too often had the weakness to agree to take these steps; but I console myself by saying that at least I always kept enough clear-sightedness not to mistake the moral quality of these applicants. More than once my secretary heard me say, as I closed the door behind one or another of them: 'There is another one whom his bad conscience and cowardice will push to reproach me, as soon as he leaves here, for always being holed up with the Germans!'

"I could not yet foresee that many of these beggars of the beginning would threaten me, two or three years later, with having me assassinated if I did not return or destroy the proofs of their approaches."

The man who had more or less smashed in my skull at La Hestre on Saint Barbara's Day in 1934, a miner named Nisole, who had become one-eyed after a mining accident, devoted himself to me so much that he followed me, as a volunteer, to the very depths of Russia in 1941, his eye wet with emotion each time I affectionately recalled to him our tussle at the platform, where he had very democratically taken the floor away from me by knocking me out with a formidable cudgel blow to the occiput.

This socialist youth had ideals, if the old hairless gnawers of the former P.O.B. no longer did. It burned to create with us a powerful socialism and to work, in fraternal comradeship, with the National Socialist movements that were arising everywhere in Europe, freed from the hypocritical domination of the old rotten and expiring parties...

Where de Man truly surpassed everything, in audacity, in 1940 and 1941, was in the matter of newspapers.

Without troubling in the least to respect the old forms of property, without even for an instant seeking to obtain normal contracts, de Man caused a whole workers' press to reappear, pushing certain publishers forward, dispossessing others by lavish use of sequestrations carried out thanks to the occupation authorities.

The socialist daily of Flanders, the Vooruit of Ghent, reappeared almost at once in the service of all the ideas it had fought, without even bothering to change its title! The revolution in minds was so complete that everything seemed normal, everything was accepted! Title, personnel, editors remained. But the newspaper acclaimed the suicide of its party, frantically praised National Socialism, still the scarecrow the day before for all its readers!

In Brussels, in 1941, de Man created a daily of his own, in French, Le Travail, which he had printed on the militarily requisitioned presses of the newspaper Le Peuple, the official monitor of the Socialist Party until Hitler's troops entered the Belgian capital.

De Man, a picturesque talker -- at least in conversation -- was incapable of writing ten lively lines in a newspaper. Whatever he did, it was cat food, which sat on the stomach. The Vooruit was published according to his directives, no more. In Brussels, de Man wanted his daily to be his personal tool. Unreadable, though well presented, Le Travail never broke through.

To print it, de Man used the splendid rotaries of the Socialist Party. In addition to them, funds also had to be available. Resuming the most detestable of the former P.O.B.'s habits, de Man drew hundreds of thousands of francs from the maneuvering fund of the trade-union organizations. His unsalable newspaper was an abyss. De Man filled it for months with money that should have served only the workers' trade-union action.

Personally, Henri de Man was always a man of absolute disinterestedness, a fantasist without needs, camping any old way in a cenobitic lodging or in a modest bachelor apartment whose door he opened himself. But the honesty of the private man does not justify the systematic raids invariably carried out on the union treasuries, in the name of a "cause" with a broad back, by the prophets of the Old and New Socialist Testament.

Of all the Belgian collaborationists of the Second World War, Henri de Man is incontestably the one who, on the morrow of the occupation, went the furthest: annihilating the principal party of the left -- his own! -- unifying in a totalitarian manner the Marxist and non-Marxist unions, seizing newspapers, having printing houses requisitioned, using considerable funds belonging to the working class, which had not been consulted, all this in collaboration with the occupier, often with his aid, thanks to his pressure or his orders.

No one greeted in more dithyrambic terms than he did the "disaster-deliverance" of May 28, 1940, and the possibilities offered to Europe by Hitler's victory.

And Henri de Man's collaboration was not limited to these external manifestations. There were other engagements, of capital importance, of which we shall speak later.

Yet, astounding as it may seem, no serious attempt was made to secure the person of Henri de Man in 1945, when National Socialism had collapsed in Europe and when the mandarins of the former P.O.B. had climbed back onto their thrones, regilded in all haste.

Disappointed by the Germans, disgusted by numerous arias, de Man had been arrested near the French frontier in 1944, when he tried to flee the "liberators." To general stupefaction, he was mysteriously released after about ten days. De Man withdrew to Switzerland. To impose his extradition would have been relatively simple. The Belgian and Allied police did indeed obtain the expulsion from Switzerland of my unfortunate wife, mother of five young children, whose whole public activity had been limited to addressing, in 1941, two messages of comfort to the wives and mothers of our volunteers on the Eastern Front. No matter: she was driven out of Switzerland to be delivered to the Allies, she, a defenseless young woman, carrying in her arms her youngest baby, eight months old. She drew ten years in prison, and did not even try to appeal this monstrous judgment, crushed by hatred and vengeance.

De Man, divorced, without family responsibilities, against whom it would have been extremely easy to assemble accusations of ordinary law -- confiscation of newspapers, use of funds from union treasuries -- was able, so much the better for him!, to remain in Switzerland, continue skiing, bronze himself in the sun, and make love with a charming Swiss woman whom he promptly married there, as his second wife.

Why this strange immunity, this silence, when from the same country a young mother was pitilessly rejected and thereby devoted to the most cowardly reprisals?

Why was a young intellectual like Jean-Hérold Paquis, a French Radio commentator under the occupation, handed over by Switzerland -- he was shot in Paris shortly thereafter -- while a minister of state like de Man, who had assumed political responsibilities a thousand times greater than those of that modest writer, could peacefully plant himself, by the flowering lakes, in a second youth?

De Man remained perfectly sheltered from all persecution. A Belgian court-martial hastened to judge him in absentia, for form's sake, without any danger whatever to his person. And they were careful, lest they annoy him, not to sentence him to death, or even to life imprisonment! For him, no question of a hempen necktie and gallows!

At the same time, more than six thousand Belgians, collaborationists of the second or third rank, were condemned to capital punishment and several hundred lesser de Mans were being savagely shot. Why this extraordinary leniency toward the man of the "disaster-deliverance"? Why this feline prudence?

Certainly, it is visible that everything that touched, from near or far, on Freemasonry was protected in 1945 and since 1945. Lippens, who invited me to wring the neck of the Belgian Constitution, was not even prosecuted. He attended, elephantine and solemn, seated in an armchair of honor, the gala ceremonies that took place after the liberation at the Palais de Justice! He was even charged, after the war, with official missions abroad! Devèze, who after my release from democratic prisons received me under his roof with transports, declarations of love, tea, and biscuits, became vice-president of the Council of Ministers of Belgian Democracy in 1946. He was promoted commander of the Legion of Honor in 1948! But the unfortunate lamp-carrier who before the war had attended a Rex meeting, or the obscure cleaning woman who, for twenty francs a day, warmed the stew at a canteen for Fridolins, were sent to the block for years!

In de Man's case, however, there was something other than the question of the Lodges. There were also the pressing interventions of Belgian monarchist circles, which feared the revelations that de Man, in the event of a trial, might have been led to make concerning the King's role in 1940. He alone knows all the secrets of Laeken; he alone could reveal what was plotted in the domain of Belgian internal policy as well as in the domain of Belgian foreign policy in 1940. Any trial of de Man would, by ricochet, be the trial of Leopold III. Nothing that de Man did was done without the approval, consent, or order of the Sovereign, in whose service, militarily, personally, daily, he found himself. Hence the extreme caution of certain ruling circles, uneasy at the thought of a scandal whose consequences no one can measure... Hence the touching zeal deployed by a certain Leopoldist press to try to whiten de Man, the confidant of Leopold III, the intimate friend of Queen Elisabeth -- he lodged at her villa at La Panne in 1940 and was her companion on walks in the dunes in the evening. People are exceedingly anxious to be nice to him. Up to now, he has kept quiet. They cover him, so that he will not uncover...

Finally, and above all, there are -- completing and closing the circuit of fright -- the fears gnawing at all the great camel-drivers of the Belgian Socialist Party.

In 1940, the demolisher of the P.O.B. had the party with him, almost in its entirety. Most of the Marxist leaders then overwhelmed the National Socialist de Man with acts of submission, signed covenants with him, wrote him letters of crawling servility which de Man, a diabolical tomcat, has carefully preserved and which today tie very many tongues...

Let de Man speak at length, let him bring out all his papers, and the Belgian Socialist Party will struggle in the most frightful confusion!

All the more because, in begging after the capitulation of 1940 for Henri de Man's friendship or support, there was not only the bleating herd of second-rank party leaders, for whom it is natural that today they should be ready for prudent "forgettings" and opportune "wiping of the slate"...

There were bigger ones than they. There was Spaak. Yes, the plump Paul-Henri Spaak. That will be for another chapter.

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XI

COMMUNIST COLLABORATION

The Belgian Communists in 1939. - Hitlerian recruiters in July 1940. - The French Communists and the “occupier.” - Lahaut taken in by General von Falkenhausen. - Socialist and Communist crowds. - Meeting of rebellious souls. - Influx of popular forces. - Spaak’s former companion, Walter Dauge. - Leaders of the P.O.B. as informers for the Gestapo.

While the former president of the P.O.B., Henri de Man, was inviting Belgian workers to rally to National Socialism and, with a sneer, sweeping away the broken crockery of the departed regime, what was becoming of the Communist Party in Belgium?

Since August 1939 it had had plenty to do. A few months earlier, Moscow’s candidates in Brussels had had themselves elected by vilifying Hitlerism. In the elections of March 1939, they had festooned Belgium with posters showing a bloodstained Hitler, his eyes bulging, holding the classic knife between his teeth.

They had scarcely had time to settle into their habits in the Belgian Chamber when Stalin and Molotov signed, in August 1939, the famous German-Soviet alliance pact, and in one small committee, in a single night, uncorked nineteen bottles of the best French champagne in honor of their new friend Joachim von Ribbentrop.

This reversal was hard to explain. In the Chamber, I had watched with amusement the faces of the representatives of the Little Father of the Peoples. They looked rather sheepish. Even Lahaut, the loudmouth of the section, hunched over his powerful arms, kept his nose buried with conviction, from one end of the sittings to the other, in the law codes which until then he had used only as free, strictly constitutional projectiles.

The little Communist group in Parliament had, physically, cohesion; it was capable of hitting, of organizing a sudden hand-to-hand struggle. Deputy Lahaut was as sturdy as a dockworker and had no equal for turning a jacket back over a colleague’s head so as to thrash him with greater ease. In catch-as-catch-can wrestling, he would have known dazzling successes.

But during the winter of 1939-1940, it was a question of explaining the inexplicable. Stalin had finished off Poland after Hitler had invaded it; he was supplying the Third Reich, at war against the “democratic” countries, with the raw materials necessary for its victory: ores for its heavy industry, oil

intended for the Luftwaffe (nine hundred thousand tons), and Ukrainian wheat that would feed the troops (one million tons).

On top of that, Stalin had jumped on Finland's back at the end of November 1939. The League of Nations had replied by theatrically expelling the U.S.S.R. from its midst on the following 14 December. The Belgian Soviet deputies were not up to facing this worldwide hurricane. Unable to explain anything, they gravely dug into the code and kept silent.

They did not have a single parliamentarian who had, intellectually, any distinction. Predispositions to boxing, flat-handed fighting, and jiu-jitsu are of essential importance in the proceedings of democratic assemblies; nevertheless, they are not always sufficient.

The Belgian turkey-keeper of the Moscow group was a pale little Brussels lawyer named Relecom, a squat fellow with the face of an athénée proctor supervising compositions from his corner.

A Socialist deputy, breaking with his party, had just swelled Moscow's group. He bore the proper name for defending the U.S.S.R.: Marteau. He had the head of a gray bulldog. He would suddenly barrel into the rows to seize a contradictor around the body. But he was not an especially wicked man, despite his bristling hair.

Lahaut was the most violent of all, with an animal-like violence: a frayed eye, built like a muzhik, uncultivated, but comic and vigorous, cheerfully tossing out, in a sing-song tone, jeering remarks that did not have much salt but won their little success in that easy, idle environment, numbed by monotony.

The Charleroi country was represented by a certain Glineur, a grasseying little myrmidon, with flat cheekbones, reddish and smooth like those of a cycle-racing champion. The rest was not worth a kopeck.

The only curiosity of the Communist group was a woman named Adère, plump as a quail, who from time to time let out little shrill cries. Lost among this herd of sanguine males, having as a competitor only a cachectic, sepulchral Jewish Socialist woman, with the face of a skeleton, named Blume, the plump Stalinist deaconess had felt the female demon working upon her. Week after week she powdered herself more, to the point where one might have believed that before entering the session she had rolled in a party baker's kneading trough. She painted her lips with red lead, as if she had wanted to protect herself against rust. With a squat bust, draped in lace that spread out like fly-swatters, her rear end contracted but victorious, she displayed curves recalling the domes of the Kremlin. Many old parliamentary blades sniffed in their rows, squinting toward this cackling fat woman, visibly desirous of studying a little more closely the so interesting evolution of the Communist woman.

During my imprisonment, I heard no more of these honorable colleagues. Had they been arrested? What had become of them? In my various jails I had rubbed shoulders only with French Communist deputies, incarcerated since the previous year. They knew nothing. Kept in absolute solitary confinement since 10 May, I knew no more.

In mid-July 1940, I was crossing Toulouse, handcuffs on my wrists, flanked by mobile guards, on the way to a new prison. Near the station, a powerful lanky fellow was holding a meeting before a fairly numerous public. People watched me pass, chained, in rags, my jaw smashed, my face ravaged, blackened by a long, bristling beard.

Suddenly I recognized the voice, a sonorous and brutal voice: it was Lahaut, the Moscow deputy from Liège!

This meeting plunged me into abysses of perplexity: the Lahaut who had my meetings attacked to the cry of “Death to Hitler!” was traveling through unoccupied France with an impressive Ausweis, issued by Hitler’s generals, on the windshield of his automobile! He harangued the Belgians, boasting to them of the paradise of occupied Belgium, gasconading, inviting the workers to return en masse to the country to manufacture, in controlled factories, the matériel that would allow the Communist-Hitlerian bloc definitively to crush Anglo-Saxon hyper-capitalism. Lahaut was full of money, distributing handfuls of hundred-sou notes to refugees, as though they were premium coupons from a brand of caramels or cigarettes.

The mobile guards made me quicken my step. I continued my sad convict’s road while the voice of the seller of mithridate continued to thunder at the far end of the square, under the blue and golden sun, for the greatest profit of the National Socialist Reich.

Lahaut was doing no more than his congeners or his foreign masters.

At that time, Stalin and Molotov had telegraphed their congratulations to Hitler and the Wehrmacht for their triumphs in Holland, Belgium, and France!

Scarcely had the fifes of the Wehrmacht sounded, sharp and joyous, on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, than the Communist leaders who had escaped the police roundups of Reynaud and Daladier were seen emerging from their hiding places. The Reich embassy in Paris and the German offices of the Propaganda Staffel were besieged by enthusiastic Communists, burning to transpose the Moscow agreements of August 1939 onto French soil. Abetz was overwhelmed by these petitioners. An artist and a sentimental man, he found temperament in them. In his eyes—and he was not mistaken—they were the only ones in France who still had punch, who were capable of reaching the masses, stirring them, and bringing them to collaborate.

The French Communists did not try to sidestep. They offered themselves sincerely. What is the foundation of communism? What was the foundation of National Socialism? A reaction against selfish, irresponsible, sterilizing individualism; a will to rebuild society by considering it as a community. Methods and ethics could differ totally from one regime to the other. But there was indisputably, at the base, a common disposition of mind: the collectivist conception of human effort, at the stage of nation and race for some, of a class for others.

Aside from these affinities, which stirred, whether one wished it or not, something deep and noble in the subconscious of the adherents of National Socialism and communism, the power, discipline, and organizing spirit of the victorious Germans had tremendously impressed the French Soviet militants, accustomed by Moscow to seeing only the goal, obeying blindly, and working through hierarchical cells.

Stalin was giving the example of collaboration; Abetz was charming, without social prejudices, frank, and audacious.

No party of the Right in France had yet begun the least collaborationist conversation when clandestine L’Humanité, on the very eve of 14 July 1940—that is to say, one month to the day after the Wehrmacht entered Paris—launched to the French proletarians this warm appeal for fraternization: “Friendly

conversations between Parisian workers and German soldiers are multiplying. We are happy about it. Let us learn to know one another. And when one tells German soldiers that the Communist deputies were thrown into prison for having defended peace, when one says that in 1923 the Communists rose up against the occupation of the Ruhr, one is working for Franco-German fraternity."

In the very week of the French capitulation, Communist leaders—notably Madame Ginolin, who after the war became the "resistance" deputy for the 12th arrondissement of Paris—had asked the occupation authorities for permission to republish, under the control of German censorship, the official organ of the Communist Party, L'Humanité, suppressed from the first days of the war by Daladier and his police. Abetz and the Propaganda Staffel granted authorization. If Parisians did not see a collaborationist L'Humanité, duly supervised by a feldgrau officer, displayed in the kiosks of the Boulevard Saint-Michel and the Place de l'Opéra, it was not because Hitler's delegates were not in agreement, but because... Pétain was not in agreement! It was the Marshal, it was Laval, who, remaining fundamentally anti-Communist, refused their assent, contrary to the German occupation authorities. Without the veto of the Vichy men, L'Humanité would have moved far ahead of Marcel Déat's and La Fouchardière's L'Oeuvre, and Bunau-Varilla's Le Matin, on the road of collaboration!

Clandestine L'Humanité nevertheless continued to preach Franco-German fraternization and to skin the English. In 1941, after ten months of General de Gaulle's "resistance," it was still denouncing to the French of France the "reactionary and anti-democratic" Frenchmen of London who, it wrote, "aim at nothing other than depriving our country of all freedom in the event of an English victory."

Only the battering-ram blow launched by Hitler on 22 June 1941 against the eastern frontier put an end to these enthusiastic embraces. Only after that date did one hear speak of Communist "resistance," resistance not to the "occupier" of Belgium or France—cherished, admired, supported for a whole year by the Western Communists—but resistance to the invader of... the U.S.S.R.

So long as it was only a matter of the invasion of their own country, the Belgian and French Communists had put the Berlin-Moscow collaboration policy before every national consideration.

Lahaut's pro-German zeal, if it had staggered me at Toulouse in mid-July 1940, was therefore absolutely in line with the Communist policy of the time. Molotov had proclaimed the necessity of a "strong Germany." Tovarich Lahaut had drawn the consequences of that orthodox affirmation.

Nearly two million Belgians had fled toward France. The factories had emptied. Hands were needed to manufacture wagons in the Cockerill yards and weapons in the workshops of the F.N. (Fabrique Nationale d'Armes). The German command urgently wished to bring the exiled working mass back into the industrial basins and railway depots. Lahaut had warmly welcomed Hitler's troops. He had patter, colorful language, a warm voice in which emotion rose quickly. The Liège employers had had the fellow in their way on the occasion of ten strikes; they knew his influence over the workers. If he, who in July 1939 insulted Hitler like a cart driver, went in July 1940 to harangue our miners, founders, arms workers, and railwaymen in free France, if he explained to them that under the Germans everything was magnificent, they would listen; the factories would fill again; the F.N. machine guns would come out in series; the goods trains would run back up toward the Rhenish stations.

The Germans found the plan very clever and gave it their complete support. Lahaut was the first Belgian to slip into France, to crisscross the southern zone, along the stony cypress groves and shining olive orchards, pockets full of banknotes, furnished with German safe-conducts and immunities more effective than those of an ambassador.

Yet Lahaut, the crafty Lahaut, had been neatly duped. When he returned from his recruiting tour for the Reich, having persuaded thousands of Walloon workers to leave the unoccupied zone to return to Belgium and help the Nazi war effort, he expected to see his efforts fully rewarded. The Communist Party, in Liège, Charleroi, Brussels as in Paris, was straining toward collaboration. But Lahaut had been manipulated by someone stronger than himself.

The Germans of Paris opened their arms to the Communists. That is true. And the latter were much better received on Rue de Lille, at the Reich embassy, than the French nobility that besieged the palace and cluttered it with monumental camellias and azaleas. Abetz, a revolutionary, liked revolutionaries.

In Brussels, by contrast, the German generals who had launched Lahaut onto the roads of the Dauphiné, Languedoc, Gascony, and Roussillon were old ultra-conservative gentlemen, full of contempt for proletarians, in whom only output interested them. A Falkenhausen, the very type of old-regime lord, had a horror of what was the people, the cares of the people, the claims of the people. A camouflaged anti-Hitlerian, he had seen in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact a new reason to detest Hitler. His formation, his prejudices, his tastes—everything drew him toward the hyper-capitalist countries.

He was truly the last man on whom Lahaut could have counted to exercise any action whatsoever under the German occupation. The use of Lahaut, advised by the big Belgian industrialists, had been only an incident. The result had been obtained. Lahaut could fall back into darkness.

And he did fall back into it. For a few weeks, Germanophile Lahaut had been squeezed like a grapefruit, then thrown into the trash once the juice had been extracted. It was over. His collaboration had served only the Reich and his old, artful enemies, the Liège plutocrats. Duped, furious, confused, General von Falkenhausen's first collaborator in date could only curse his unscrupulous employer, while waiting for the first day of the war against the Soviets, when that employer, sardonic and contemptuous, had him seized in his bed and thrown into a dungeon.

The Communist public of Brussels had not been too surprised, in July and August 1940, by the about-face of Lahaut, who had become traveling salesman for the occupiers. Since the Stalin-Ribbentrop agreement of August 1939, it had become accustomed to coups de théâtre.

The fashion at that moment was Germanophilia. The population, in Belgium as in France, had been astonished to the highest degree by the power of the Reich troops, by their bearing, their politeness, their discipline, and their style. "They" never looted. They were well equipped, freshly shaved every day; they marched and sang admirably. And then they were handsome specimens, tall blond fellows, magnificently tanned, a little childlike, with clear eyes: women adore that sort.

On café terraces, Germans and "occupied" civilians drank side by side. There was not the slightest hatred anywhere.

De Man, president of the so-called P.O.B. until 28 May 1940, had gone over, bag and baggage, to National Socialism. Lahaut was strolling about gloriously at the foot of the Pyrenees, thanks to a Nazi Ausweis. The two great workers' parties had ranged themselves behind the swastika. What could the Belgian worker, naturally conservative and conformist besides, have said or done?

I knew the working masses thoroughly. There was not a Socialist or Communist stronghold where I had not spoken. I had carried contradiction into most of the Maisons du Peuple. Sometimes I was received

there amid a fine uproar. But, in any case, I was the one who dared to come. They called me “Léon,” familiarly. I animated the assemblies. Curiosity mingled with popular good nature, which found its satisfaction even in the brawls.

Socialist audiences were massive, often amorphous: the heroic times had passed. Communist audiences, by contrast, were often traversed by furious passions.

After the Second World War, the Moscow public greatly broadened, reaching the moderate circles of the proletariat. But at the moment of Rex’s great breakthrough in 1937, there were only three Communist deputies in Belgium. In 1939 there were nine in all. The proletarian sea still belonged to the Socialist Party. The Communist Party had to content itself with the foam left on the receding beach. I was always struck when I saw the number of physically abnormal people who filled the meeting halls of the Lahauts, the Glineurs, and the Relecoms. There was there an incredible conglomeration of lame men, squat little fellows, crickets, misshapen people; all those who had a club foot, an enormous mouth, a squinting eye, a stump of an arm, were found again in these Communist audiences. Poor people, more worthy of respect than others, for their physical misfortune hurt; rejected by life, accustomed since childhood to jeers, revolted in their very flesh, they were naturally inclined to support everything that rose up against a world that had marked them forever, blindly, unjustly.

Half of the Communist audiences before 1940 was composed of these “degenerates.” I have never seen such a collection of swollen skulls, galosh-shaped faces, dislocated eyes, and greenish skins. Each time my heart ached from it. The other half of the Moscow audiences was formed of rebellious souls, not only unleashed souls to whom anger, envy, and vengeance appealed, but also, at times, souls that had received the mysterious fire marking beings made for higher gifts.

Few intellectuals were found among these beings stretched toward an instinctive ideal. The intellectual calculates too much, is too attached to his material ease, and rarely cuts the moorings that hold him to the habits and facilities of his social milieu. He is capable of running risks, but only when the odds have begun to appear clearly on the board of a near destiny. To be a true revolutionary, one must have nothing to lose or—a very rare case—be ready to lose everything: comfort, family, worldly ties. Before 1940, the Belgian Communist Party lacked, in order to impose itself by normal means, those cultured and ambitious young bourgeois of the Vandervelde type who, at the end of the nineteenth century, had given nascent socialism its tone and “standing.”

The tension of rebellious souls around stubborn and loud-mouthed illiterates like Lahaut or Glineur was only the more pathetic.

The upheaval of 1940 strongly struck the minds and sensibilities of these young proletarian idealists. It was as if, all at once, the enormous walls of prejudice that separated them from us had collapsed. They had often heard me, often contradicted me; they knew our impulses, our mystique. The rupture of 1940 revealed our sincerity to them. And, passing from one extreme to the other, like the numerous Socialist Young Guards, they felt bound to us by irresistible affinities.

Lahaut was foolishly running to his slave-driver’s tasks by limousine. On our side, we abstained from all contact with the Communist chiefs despite their about-face. It was not communism that interested us, but the souls that burned within it.

From them to us, above the old partisan frameworks, communion was at once established. In all the workers’ centers, admirable young Communists of 1939 joined us. Several hundred came with me to

the Russian front in 1941, opening their eyes wide when they saw what that U.S.S.R. of mud-walls, misery, filth, and slavery was, which from afar had seemed for so long to them the Eldorado of the workers.

I had welcomed them into Rex as I have always welcomed idealists, wherever they came from: with absolute and fraternal confidence. It is better to be duped ten times by rogues than to discourage a pure and open heart. We did not have to fear invasion: if we were not capable of converting, that was because we did not have faith! Souls that burn can do everything, change everything.

Some came to us malignantly, to deceive us, spy on us, lay the most dangerous traps for us, slipping, notably under orders, among our volunteers on the Eastern Front. They could have shot me down with extreme ease. They were won over like the others, affectionately bringing me, after a hard battle in which I had braved death beside them—or for them—their membership card of the Communist Party or the Resistance.

An ardent ideal is an invincible weapon.

Instead of fearing these passages of left-wing elements into our ranks, I encouraged them with all my strength.

At the beginning of Rexism, I had aimed the essential part of my action at the conquest of the working and peasant masses. The bourgeois marches by himself when one wins. Since he is always afraid of being harmed materially, he is always ready to yield politically and morally. Fear and interest are the levers of his doctrine.

What attracted me was the enormous popular health, that reservoir of sincerity, good humor, work, fidelity, and strong and simple virtues.

At the beginning of my public action, I organized hundreds of meetings in the large proletarian localities, risking blows, going there alone by tramway, without any guard, because I wanted to seduce and convince. The results of this work were great: in 1935 and 1936, I won tens of thousands of workers. The basins of Liège, Charleroi, and Verviers became Rex bastions, giving us by themselves, at one stroke, six deputies.

I could come to any industrial locality and a sea of listeners was there. Fear among the Marxist leaders was intense, and the counteroffensive began, unfolding with unheard-of bad faith and violence. Everywhere the Marxist mayors banned my meetings. Workers registered in our unions were terrorized. I was covered with stupid and frightful calumnies. The people, intimidated and impressed, halted their momentum. Our popular recruitment was stopped.

Yet we had at all costs to receive this influx of life. Not in order to collect members or voters. But because we wanted to be the living people, and life was there, in the thousands of workers' rows, near the glowing slag heaps, in those interminable, monotonous, blackish settlements, with their disjointed paving stones and their skies swept by long gray streaks.

To renounce this workers' force, this constant upsurge of vigor, this will, this honesty, was to escape from reality; it was to play the comedy of political life, to be nothing more than a survivor's skin on a dead body.

The Socialist Young Guards, the young Communist idealists joining us in the autumn of 1940, passing still warm into our ranks like the workers of 1936, brought us once again the pure blood, the powerful blood of the people, without which power is only a decoy.

There is no one on the Left or the far Left who was not sensitive, in 1940, to the victory of National Socialism. The chiefs, the de Mans, the Lahauts, had from June onward placed themselves either in tow of the New Order or at the disposal of the Reich military men. The youth, more disinterested, had fraternized with our youth rather than fraternizing with the occupiers. The most extremist were our most convinced converts.

Situated between the Communist Party and the P.O.B., fanatical and until then irreducible, was the group of "Revolutionary Socialist Action," created by the man from the Borinage, Walter Dauge. In the political kaleidoscope of prewar Belgium, Dauge represented a very curious element.

Born among the miners, Dauge had made himself, had studied at Mons, and had given himself a sensitive, human culture that stood out among the elementary minds of his party. With fine, almost transparent skin, eyes and smile animated by a somewhat melancholy and captivating charm, Dauge was an orator with an admirably harmonious voice. A rare thing among Belgian politicians, he used a perfect language, in which the soft and light vowels sang. He had rapidly won great prestige among the workers of the Borinage, musicians at heart, always sensitive to eloquence, sister of music.

But Dauge was not merely an enchanter. He was, in 1935, an incandescent idealist. The moral mediocrity of the P.O.B., the heavy embourgeoisement of its chiefs, the financial scandals of the party, had raised him up as a Savonarola of Belgian socialism. At the moment when I was whipping the "rotten ones" of the parties of the Right, Dauge, at the other end of the political lists, was unmasking and booting the Marxist leaders, corrupted and settled into idleness.

He could then have provoked, on the Left, a groundswell, although the working masses, brigaded into their trade-union organizations, bound by dues, benefits, and medical care, were more difficult to turn away from their habits than the great anonymous public of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes before whom, every evening, I was smashing the old idols to pieces.

What ruined Dauge in full ascent was his association with Paul-Henri Spaak. Spaak was then a bourgeois of about thirty-five, enrolled in the P.O.B. because the future lay on the Left, but who was champing at the bit, impatient and especially ambitious. Dauge ingenuously believed that Spaak's violence drew its nourishment from a sincere revolutionary feeling, for Spaak went down into the street with the fanatics and went with them to break the windows of right-thinking newspapers.

Dauge spread in the Borinage a vitriolic weekly, L'Action socialiste. Spaak, desiring, in order to put pressure on the party bosses, to hold the provincial working masses in hand, leaned on Dauge, who was happily surprised to see a militant from the capital, a bustling lawyer, flatter him and bind himself to him. They shared the direction of the newspaper, whose vengeful articles stirred up the mine workers and made the comfortably provided viziers of the Socialist Party tremble in their armchairs.

Spaak pushed the blackmail to the highest degree, taking care, however, not to let the thermometer burst. He came within a finger's breadth of being thrown out of the P.O.B. Dauge was in heaven seeing the zeal of his co-director.

When panic in the Socialist Party reached its height, Spaak, the Spaak who broke windowpanes, the

Spaak who was going to blow everything up in company with his friend Walter, Spaak, succeeding in a stroke where he was to become master, suddenly exchanged diatribes, threats, and broken glass for a ministerial portfolio. In half a day, Walter Dauge was left in the lurch and Paul-Henri Spaak became minister.

The honest man in the affair, incontestably, had been Dauge. The cynic had been Spaak. Yet it was the idealist who was going to sink, and Spaak who was going to rise. One would see him repeat the operation of turning his coat numerous times: being fiercely faithful to the King in 1939, when the King held the State; covering the King with abominable insults on 28 May 1940, after the capitulation; offering himself to the Germans when he believed them victorious forever; returning to Churchill when the Reich had disdained his offers; becoming again, in London, a defender of Leopold III when news from Brussels taught him that the whole country was with the Monarch; insultingly torpedoing the latter's return to Belgium in 1945, when he learned that Leopold III was determined to eliminate him; having the project of creating a Socialist-Communist governmental bloc acclaimed from the balcony of the Maison du Peuple in Brussels on the evening of the 1946 elections, which tripled the strength of the Belgian Moscow men; but forming in 1947 a bourgeois ministry with the royalist Catholics and setting it against the Communists, his allies of the day before.

All these political harlequinades, instead of discrediting Spaak, have given him a well-established reputation as a clever man. If virtuous, Spaak would have got nowhere. Politically amoral, he has got everywhere.

Dauge's setbacks illustrated the adventure doubly. He had held firm. Despite his teammate's betrayal, he continued the struggle, impoverished, holding meetings every evening in the workers' rows, while Spaak, a carnation on his dinner jacket, pursued his gilded ascent in the salons.

Forty times, fifty times, from 1935 to 1940, I had Dauge as a contradictor. Pale, features tense, sentimental, biting, he tried to block my path. But he wore himself out in the fight. One evening, I saw with sadness that I held the victory. The meeting had scarcely ended when Dauge fell on the floor, backstage, in the grip of an epileptic seizure. I say it frankly: that evening I suffered. For that boy conducted his struggle with idealism.

But in politics, iron health is the first law. Dauge struggled as long as he could against the bonzes, against the millions of the Socialist Party's secret funds, against the excommunications of the Congress. He should have gone to Brussels, as I had done. One does not lead a revolution from an obscure provincial village. Only the capital permits one to radiate, to impose oneself. Ill, he obstinately fought from his workers' village of Flénu. He was a candidate in the legislative elections, on a separate list, in Hainaut; he obtained a large success but was not elected. He triumphed in the communal elections, but his appointment as mayor was annulled by the Government. He had chosen the path of political rectitude, which leads nowhere. On 10 May 1940, Janson, Spaak's uncle, sent him to rot in the dungeons of Mons prison. He too, the impenitent Socialist, like all adversaries of the old parties, had been thrust into the bag of suspects of Hitlerism!

Two months later, seeing at last the possibility of exercising action in broad daylight and suddenly touched by the National Socialist mystique, Dauge passed over to the New Order, like so many other idealists of the far Left.

But it was written that this boy was to have every kind of bad luck: when on 22 June 1941 the Germans flung the Belgian Communists into prison, Dauge flew again into a dungeon! When the Hitlerians were

arrested, he was arrested! When the anti-Hitlerians were arrested, he was arrested! Sincerity is an impossible path.

I was about to leave for the Eastern Front. Dauge had not become a Rex member, but he had nothing to do with the Soviets. He had been my most relentless enemy before the war, but I respected him because he was upright, and because Spaak's ministerial triumph, after betraying him, had disgusted me. I went to see the Germans. Obstinate, they did not want to let him out. In the end, I stood guarantee for him personally, in writing. Only then did they decide to release him. He did not even thank me. But I was sure I had carried out a just action.

This last adventure had finished disgusting Dauge with everything: the Socialists, the anti-Socialists, the National Socialists, the Communists. Politics now appeared to him as a sea of mud, impossible to empty, in which it was important to know how to swim. He tried to swim, launched himself into obscure affairs of influence, fraud, and black market. Meanwhile, he had fallen ill. He ended his life miserably, murdered in his bedroom, a few steps from his young wife.

No doubt Spaak, having arrived at the highest honors, thinks only with a pitying smile of the ardent young leader of Flénu who, for his part, believed what he said.

He died forgotten, repudiated, murdered. But for several years there, in the sad and monotonous alleys of the Borinage country, there was a soul that burned...

And a soul is something. Whereas all the ministerial portfolios in the world are nothing...

If Dauge again knew the dungeons in 1941, if several thousand Communists were locked up on the morning of that 22 June, it is because the collaborationist zeal of certain big pashas of Belgian socialism had been such that they personally supplied the Gestapo with the list of their political adversaries to be put under lock and key.

Ignominy of party politics. In everything, it is a matter of not losing the opportunity to eliminate the competitor! What does the baseness of the procedure matter if the result is attained, if rivals are pushed off the road to power, if voters, disoriented or deceived, are led to change democratic pigeonholes!

In 1941, Marxist collaborationism thus descended to the most criminal informing. The tone was set by the Socialist mayor of Liège, the first city of Wallonia, a man named Bologne, who coldly communicated to the Germans the names and addresses of all the Communist militants of the Liège district, victims offered by party hatred and ambition to the lower pits of military prisons and to the blue-and-white-striped columns of concentration camps.

In less than thirteen months, Socialist collaboration had passed from the convinced glorification of Hitler's victory ("this collapse, far from being a disaster, is a deliverance") to the dispatch, on 22 June, of herds of Belgian proletarians, competitors of the far Left, to the cattle-pens of the Gestapo.

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XII

CATHOLIC COLLABORATION

The Catholic politicians at Limoges. - Their pitiful return to Belgium. - Pierre von Papen. - Collaborationist masochism. - My interview with Cardinal Van Roey. - Not a single Catholic “resister” in 1940. - Not one anti-collaborationist directive. - Satan’s back. - Pierlot or Degrelle at the Te Deum? - The case of La Libre Belgique. - The Flemish Catholic press. - Bodart and the Christian-Democratic collaborationists. - Tschoffen’s relentless offers. - The execution of Catholic deputy Vindevogel.

The Belgian party most severely mishandled by the tornado of May and June 1940 was the Catholic Party. Before the Second World War it had lost the youngest and most dynamic elements of its troops, who had passed by the hundreds of thousands into the ranks of Rex and the V.N.V.

The electoral mass that remained to it was amorphous, sticky as fish sauce, conservative, timid, without initiative, without imagination: the heavy, dull, flat river of the right-thinking.

The “Catholic” representation in Parliament was of the same flour: a docile, pious, sorrowful herd, without fantasy.

28 May 1940 provoked a crisis of madness among this conglomerate of fleeing churchwardens. King Leopold III, unable to act otherwise, had capitulated. Instead of trusting their Sovereign, or at least trying to see clearly into his reasons and abstaining in the meantime, the Catholic parliamentarians, trembling and panic-stricken, feeling around them the blind fury of the misled French crowds rising, lost their heads.

A few days later, the Belgian Parliament met at Limoges. The “Catholics” were more cowardly, more vile, more insulting than all the other barkers put together, howling so that no one would accuse them of not howling, voting en masse, on foreign soil, they, Belgian deputies, for the order of the day that branded the defeated King of the Belgians and proclaimed his unworthiness before the universe!

That a Paul Reynaud should then have thrown his furious and imbecile braying into the microphone was already revolting. But that the defeated King of the Belgians, a prisoner, should be sullied by his own subjects surpassed everything in infamy. Yet the Catholic Party, normal support of Throne and Altar, the most numerous party in Parliament, had not hesitated to play the leading role in this foul litter.

New catastrophes, coming in series, were going to grind these treacherous speechmakers like olives.

The rout of the French armies had proved Leopold III right. He had resisted foot by foot with his soldiers for eighteen days, from the Albert Canal to Bruges, while the German offensive in France, begun on the Somme on 5 June 1940, had submerged Paris at the end of a week and had entered Bordeaux with a racket at the end of two weeks. The “Battle of France” had in fact lasted three or four days in all: from 10 June onward, the plunge southward was no more than a rally for the Germans.

The “Catholic” deputies and senators of Belgium, collapsed, found themselves scattered through the dusty villages of the Midi, sickened by the smells of brandade and the breaths of garlic, fighting lice and bedbugs, tearing their hair in despair, wondering how they could ever appear again before their voters.

The first reactions from the country reached them, made of anger, contempt, and shame. The judgment

that struck them hardest was that of the Primate Cardinal of Belgium. From Sunday, 2 June 1940, he placed himself on the side of King Leopold, whom they had cowardly, abominably outraged: “Deeply regrettable attitude,” the Archbishop proclaimed in his letter to the faithful, while he described Leopold III’s act as “chivalrous and wholly to his honor.”

Lost with the Sovereign, lost with the Archbishop, collapsed in their droppings, they were not proud. First, hypocritically, believing me dead, they wanted to have a Mass sung for the repose of my soul, hoping thus to clear themselves. Then they returned to Belgium as best they could, in butchers’ or milkmen’s vans, or on fire engines.

They were very careful not to put their noses outside. The only Catholic parliamentarian who still dared to walk in the Rue de la Loi was Count de Kerckove d’Exaerde, vice-president of the Chamber, a modest and pleasant old man, who nearly fell flat on his back when, having believed me buried for three months, he suddenly saw me, in flesh and bone, in the middle of Brussels, a few meters from him.

The other count of the Catholic Party, Carton de Wiart, called Caviar de Carton, overwhelmed the King with letters of apology, groaned, implored, received no answer, and wandered under the chestnut trees of Avenue Louise, lugubrious, dried out, his eyes like trouser buttons, an old dead fish held upright by a false collar.

There was obviously no question, for any of these hares, of being admitted to “collaborate” in anything whatever. They were sunk, demonetized in the eyes of everyone, at the Palace of Laeken, in society, among the public. It would have been morally impossible for them to give a lecture or publish an article. They all holed up.

Only one of them still stirred weakly. It was Pierre Nothomb, senator of the province of Luxembourg. He explained to me, tears in his eyes, that he was—which is true—the cousin of Franz von Papen, Hitler’s vice-chancellor of 30 January 1933. Not letting himself be completely crushed, he had run to make use of this illustrious relationship with the occupying authorities. The bluff worked. He became for the Nazis a sort of Volksdeutsch. He thus obtained, the only Belgian in this case, authorization to go by car to Austria in search of his prisoner son.

Four thousand Rex militants, taken in the capitulation of the Belgian army, remained shut up in German Stalags until 8 May 1945. But Pierre Nothomb’s son was released as early as August 1940 and returned to the country in a limousine, while touring about.

Pierre Nothomb, or, if one wishes, Pierre von Papen, was a sorry sight. We drank a half-pint together on the terrace of the Café de la Paix in Paris. Cruelly, I told him that all those who had outraged the King at Limoges were going to lose the titles of nobility they had received from the monarchy. Poor Pierre had sweated blood and water to be made a baron, after years of flatteries and intrigues. I amused myself ferociously by serving and re-serving him the frightful news of this imminent degradation which, heartlessly, I had just invented on the spot. His eyes wavered, like tadpoles rising to the surface. He left in despair, wiping his eyelids with the condemned crown on his handkerchief.

Apart from this exception, the Catholic Party remained knocked out, nose to the ground. Not one of its representatives at that time dared draw the attention of the Court or of public opinion.

The de Mans, the Devèzes, the Lahauts had not been in France. But it is written that bad actions always pay. It is to their scandalous vote at Limoges that the Catholic politicians, then disqualified for a low

blow, owe the preservation, in the autumn of 1940, of their patriotic virginity, pure as the lilies of the field.

The desire, certainly, was not lacking in them to collaborate. Their efforts to please the New Order were touching. One of them, deputy Michaux, even pushed masochism so far as to send to the censored press —and notably to Paul Colin, for Le Nouveau Journal—the stenographic, strictly secret account of the Limoges session where he and his colleagues had dishonored themselves.

They were all sick with jealousy at seeing de Man advance. But what were they to do? Everywhere, if they had tried to taste politics again, they would have been vigorously spanked. They dragged their vote behind them like a tin can. To be forgotten, to stay quiet, was their only resource. Obliged very much against their will to keep still, they thus escaped for the most part, sullen and groaning, the collaborationist temptation.

Only a few Flemish parliamentarians among them managed to be tolerated, and they discreetly fell in step with the victorious V.N.V.

A fervent Christian, knowing the interpenetrations of the spiritual and the temporal, I would not have wanted to enter the path of collaboration without first consulting the religious authorities of my country.

I had had with Cardinal Van Roey, before the war, sometimes stormy disputes. The man was not easy, authoritarian, stubborn, of a grumbling character. He would suddenly bring his crozier down on your head without warning. Through him my skull had been handsomely bumped several times. But principles must pass before bumps. And despite our quarrels, I had asked His Eminence to receive me, wishing to be enlightened by him—as by King Leopold—before acting.

The Cardinal received me amiably one morning at his archiepiscopal palace in Malines, a sinister Capuchin-house where pale doorkeepers with twisted limbs and abnormal faces wander.

The Cardinal’s office was on the first floor, preceded by a small, close-smelling salon. It was reached by a waxed staircase overlooking a garden where a whole feathered tribe cackled: “my hens,” the bucolic Primate, a poultryman in his leisure hours, had innocently told me as we passed.

The conversation was direct. Cardinal Van Roey never had a lively concern for nuances and forms. Cut like a grenadier of Frederick the Great, rough as a Limburg village constable, he had kept from his peasant ancestry the habit of putting his feet—which are large—straight before him, whatever the state of the roads. He is animated by an elementary, total, cyclonic fanaticism which has its grandeur but also its limits. In other centuries, while singing the Magnificat, he would have put infidels to the sword, grilled or dropped into oubliettes the skittish sheep of his flock. In the twentieth century he has only the crozier left, but he makes it do a famous job. Everything, in his eyes, possessed real importance—happy, to be supported; harmful, to be crushed—only insofar as it served or disserved the interest of the Church under its multiple forms: works, parties, newspapers, agricultural cooperatives, banking institutions, insofar as they assured the temporal power of the divine institution.

He did not like strong regimes. In general the Church prefers feeble regimes. It advances more, outwardly at least, in the slackness of the State, made thereby more permeable to its infiltrations. Philip II, the most pious of the sovereigns of the Spanish Habsburg dynasty, had run into difficulties several times with the Holy See. The troops of Charles V had had to take Rome by assault. Saint Louis, Saint

Louis himself, had had serious conflicts of influence with the papacy.

In the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, Cardinal Van Roey would have thrown, very evangelically, into the Tiber or into the Dyle these intrusive crowned competitors.

In 1940, besides being convinced that Hitler had nothing, mystically, of a cousin of Saint Louis, Cardinal Van Roey was stirred with indignation at the thought of the dangers that threatened the Catholic Church in newly occupied Belgium.

And there, sincerely, he was exaggerating. Nothing permitted one seriously to think, during the autumn of 1940, of the imminence of this persecution about which the Cardinal spoke to me, trembling.

The word "trembling," when one speaks of Cardinal Van Roey, must always of course be interpreted according to the personage. When the Cardinal "trembled," one had to be furiously attentive to perceive in him the most discreet emotion.

I remember, on this subject, the great Congress of Catholic Youth that took place in Brussels in 1930. I was standing behind Monsignor Picard, who himself was beside the Cardinal. The procession had lasted two hours, a formidable procession full of spirit: one hundred thousand young men had passed, acclaiming the religious authorities massed on the platform. The Cardinal, his face implacably sullen, had not uttered a word nor sketched a smile since the beginning of the demonstration. What could he be thinking? When the last column approached Place Poelaert, the Cardinal bent toward Monsignor Picard and said these four words, the only ones he let drop all afternoon: "I am boiling with enthusiasm!" Good Monsignor Picard turned toward me, lively, and whispered in my ear: "What would it be if he were not boiling!" In short, speaking to me that morning in his office at Malines about the imminent religious persecution that was going to sweep over our country, the Cardinal "boiled," that is to say he allowed a few very slight symptoms of internal animation to appear. Very slowly—it was as though he were manufacturing his words one by one, rolling them in bread crumb, then externalizing them—he explained to me that his schools would be decatholicized by the Germans. I did not think so. I had learned from various sources that among the occupation authorities in Brussels there were fervent Catholics. Visibly, the Militärverwaltung was not seeking to stray into religious battles. It is a fact that the Catholic schools in Belgium, from 1940 to 1944, were the object of no oppressive measure; they continued to receive their half-billion annual subsidy, gave hundreds of thousands of pupils a religious formation, often seasoned with violent political spices, without this being hindered in the slightest way. Never did the University of Louvain count so many students as at that period. A born neophobe, the Cardinal read almost nothing that appeared in Belgium, and he had only the most summary views on the movements that were shaking other countries. He schematized everything to the extreme, already seeing himself at the threshold of a new Peasants' War, as under the occupation of the sans-culottes, or of a School War, as under Bara and Frère-Orban.

His concern proved, moreover, the awareness he had of his responsibilities. He declared to me, his lips stirring: "If the Germans touch our schools, I will rise up and fight them." "You may be certain, Eminence," I replied, "that in the event of a persecution of that order, all the Rex people, Catholic or not, will fight at your side for religious freedom in their country."

One could guess, from the Cardinal's tone of voice, that in the armory of the Archbishopric the collection of croziers was polished, quite ready.

I offered the Primate of Belgium, if he thought his youth organizations were running any danger, and if

he wished to camouflage them, to shelter them under the aegis of Rex, these formations of course remaining under his most absolute religious control. But the Cardinal, enemy of the totalitarianisms toward which he constantly directed his windmill strokes, was himself a totalitarian in the integral state. Extremely touchy about his rights and his sphere of influence—which included everything—he claimed to owe nothing to anyone from that point of view. Impaled, or lying on the gridiron of Saint Lawrence, he would not have yielded to temporal power one cruet belonging to his beadle. He thanked me for my proposal, but without "boiling." Arrangements were not his strong point. Dictatorial as Hitler and Mussolini together, this old man, convinced but combative, naturally preferred a formidable fight to the momentary and apparent abandonment of any particle whatever of his prerogatives.

I therefore dropped an offer that the religious peace during the occupation made, in any case, quite without effect.

That was the spiritual domain. There remained the temporal domain, mine, I, a political man. And there, frankly, honestly, I am sure I do not distort the Cardinal's words in saying that collaboration then appeared to him as an absolutely normal line of conduct, indeed the only one that could come to the mind of a sensible being. He did not envisage for a single instant before me, throughout the whole interview, that another attitude was simply possible. For the Cardinal, as for all Belgians, the war, in the autumn of 1940, was over. He did not even pronounce the name of the English, did not even put forward the supposition that an Allied recovery was imaginable.

As for the Pierlot government, it was not evoked once in our exchange of views, even as a revenant. It was the past, a past dead in anarchy and shame. It was the future that dominated our interview.

I spoke at length to Cardinal Van Roey of my plans and of my first contacts with various Belgian personalities. He listened to me with his customary immobility, but with an open face, interrupting me from time to time with a word that translated his interest.

I pressed the point to be quite sure that I was not taking the wrong road. The Cardinal did not utter the slightest remark of a nature to turn me away from political collaboration or to counsel me another attitude: either opposition or abstention. Yet he knew perfectly well—I had told him—that on his opinion and on the King's would depend my line of conduct and that of the innumerable Belgians, for the most part Catholics, who followed me.

I would not wish to commit the Cardinal further than he went in a temporal domain that, theoretically, was not his. But I am sure I report our conversation exactly by summarizing it thus: first, the Cardinal feared a religious persecution, the only aspect of the occupation that then truly awakened his anxiety, and I assured him of Rex's unlimited support if anyone touched the freedom of Catholic education in Belgium; second, the Cardinal did not even think that any solution other than collaboration was politically conceivable; third, he found absolutely nothing to object—not a word, not a gesture—to the exposition of my conceptions and my plans.

Now, he was a man of frank speech, and he had known me personally for a very long time. He could perfectly well have refused to receive me. He had received me. He could—he should—if he judged that I was going politically astray, have warned me, since I had come to ask his counsel.

I dreamed of reconciling the fact of our country's occupation with the permanent interests of our people. I was at Malines to know whether this plan was licit. The Cardinal found nothing in it to criticize. In the opposite case, his words and his attitude would have oriented my action in a quite

different way and, by ricochet, the action of the hundreds of thousands of Catholics who, after this interview, engaged in my wake among the pitfalls of a collaboration richer in worries than in felicities.

Monsignor Van Roey was not a timid little seminarian but a sanguine giant who liked to charge. If he was fanatical, he was courageous too: he would not have fled his responsibilities, would not have taken refuge, during a decisive interview, in lawyerly circumlocutions. If my requests had called for a counsel of abstention, he would have given it to me, with a little more amiability perhaps than he had once administered various blows of the crozier, but with the same firmness.

He formally refrained from doing so. I asked no more, not having come to visit a party leader, but a religious leader, a moral guide who would tell me whether I could go forward without clashing with the interests of the Church and the Christian conception of patriotism.

Before my departure, the Cardinal paternally gave me his blessing. And through the green and russet fields where a white autumn sun floated, I returned to Brussels, spiritually enlightened as to the choice of my future path.

Other Catholics besides myself looked, in the autumn of 1940, toward the powerful black tower of Saint Rombaut, beyond the artichoke fields and asparagus beds of the Malines country. Numerous were those who then entered the archiepiscopal palace, in order to consult Monsignor Van Roey or his immediate entourage on the morality, usefulness, or necessity of collaboration.

The opinions were fairly elastic. The most diverse orientations were seen to manifest themselves among Catholics, after the multiple visits then made to the Cardinal-Primate: discreet waiting here, collaborationism there, without however noting, in 1940, a single declared case of opposition or resistance.

More than a thousand Catholic burgomasters, all the secretaries-general, though selected with care, adapted without delay to the New Order. Other eminent Catholics, in Wallonia as well as in Flanders, accepted key functions with the explicit agreement of the Militärverwaltung. This was notably the case with the new burgomaster of the capital of Flanders, Antwerp, and with the new governor of the province of Luxembourg.

Can one imagine that all these brave people, imprisoned in very great numbers in 1944, or overwhelmed with outrages, had not asked themselves in 1940: What does Malines think? Who will be made to believe that, at Malines itself, or through the bishoprics, or through their priests, they had not received the desired reassurances?

Eight tenths of the Belgian collaborationists were Catholics (on the Eastern Front, in the Wallonia Legion as in the Flanders Legion, the proportion was even higher). A certain number of Catholics were catalogued under the label of Rexists or Flemish nationalists, Rex and the V.N.V. having absorbed, from before the war, the youngest and most dynamic Catholic elements of the country. But, in reality, almost all the new governors, burgomasters, and higher Flemish-nationalist officials were Christians of old stock. Likewise, the Rexists who accepted the government of the provinces of Hainaut, Liège, Brabant, and the New Order governor, Prince de Croÿ, who directed the province of Namur, were convinced Catholics, as were the very great majority of our permanent deputies, burgomasters, and senior officials.

To none of them, any more than to me, did Malines or the various bishoprics, during those decisive

weeks for their choice, give negative advice, either written or verbal.

In 1945, after having allowed tens of thousands of these unfortunates to be tortured in prisons and fresh, pure young Christian girls to be outraged and raped from one end of the country to the other, with abominable sadism, in the dungeons and guardrooms of the “Resistance,” it was asserted, with some audacity, once the corpses had cooled and the panting victims of the rutting “patriots” had been sent to hospitals, that all this was the fruit of disobedience to the “directives” of the Archbishopric: “Far from me,” Cardinal Van Roey coldly proclaimed on 2 September 1945, “far from me the idea of approving all that took place under the cover of repression”—it would only have needed that!—“it is a dark history and one that does not honor our country. But I insist on declaring that if all our fellow citizens had listened to the voice of the Episcopate, this history would not have occurred.”

To which women, to which young girls undressed, raped, dragged naked in public, martyred by the democratic heroes, to which governors, to which secretaries-general, to which imprisoned burgomasters, to which Flemish-nationalist or Rexist leaders, did His Eminence, in 1940, order, or simply advise, that they refuse collaborationist action? When? Where? How?

To all those who—I in particular—filially consulted the religious authorities before deciding to act, Malines and the bishoprics forbade nothing, advised against nothing. They feared a religious persecution, that is all. But, politically, they let us commit ourselves thoroughly, not at all seeing with a bad eye—like Leopold III in this in every respect—that reliable compatriots, royalists in the eyes of one, fervent Catholics in the eyes of the other, should be at the head of collaboration in the case, then very probable, where German supremacy in Europe would have stabilized in definitive and irremediable fashion.

Later, it is true, Malines put on the coat of two parishes, then drifted more and more into anti-German opposition, as the Allies recovered, exactly. This opposition was accompanied, in the strictly religious domain, by vexations and painful repression. But even then, the archiepiscopal avatars were disorderly, at the mercy of the Cardinal’s cyclonic indignations and mood-swings, striking right and left with the crozier at full swing, the Germans one day, the Anglo-Americans the next. Even after the war was over, this game of massacre continued behind the scenes, this time about the Christian Democrats and the royal question. It is an incurable case. As long as Cardinal Van Roey lives, he will strike with the crozier, he will always find someone or something to crozier. Lying in the grave, he will still pound, with great blows, against the planks of his coffin.

If he disapproved the principle of collaboration, this warlike temperament had had, in the summer and autumn of 1940, ten opportunities to make his disagreement known. Decisions were then being taken, decisions that would command the years to come. Once the New Order was in full momentum, how stop the machine? Before setting it in motion, thousands of Catholics were looking toward the Archbishopric. If collaboration was putting the country on a false road, it was then or never—because it was perfectly still time for future collaborators not to advance, or still time to stop—for the much-loved and so often employed archiepiscopal weapon to whistle through the air. Yet that was precisely the only time when the Cardinal’s crozier did not whirl.

During those long decisive months of 1940 when Belgians found themselves—spiritually and civically—before the precise case of conscience of political collaboration, no pastoral letter made heard, even very discreetly, the “voice of the Episcopate” on this capital problem. In the intimacy of the Archbishopric no more was there manifested, to the visitors begging for advice, an opposition of principle to a position in favor of the New Order. Neither I, nor any of the personalities who came in

1940 to Malines to consult the Cardinal, received from him a negative instruction. Such is, whether it pleases or not, the naked truth.

The attitude taken by the higher Catholic clergy abroad could only reinforce the conviction of the faithful that collaboration was perfectly compatible with faith and with patriotism. At Vichy, the highest prelates of France had themselves photographed beside the Marshal and Pierre Laval, after the Pétain-Hitler interview. In Paris, Cardinal Baudrillart declared himself publicly and proudly collaborationist.

In Belgium itself, Cardinal Van Roey perfectly admitted that one of the most famous priests of Flanders —its greatest Catholic intellectual—Father Cyriel Verschaeve, should declare, on 7 November 1940, during a solemn session in the amphitheater of the Senate, in the presence of a German general, President Raeder: “It is the task of the Cultural Council to throw the bridge that will link Flanders to Germany and over which hearts and minds will be able to join. For we are Germans.”

During this crucial year, His Eminence quite truly let the faithful become entangled in the glue of collaboration, without bestowing on them, either in public or in private, a single one of those pretended anti-collaborationist “directives” or “recommendations” that he invoked quite gratuitously in 1945, when the communizing maquis sharply demanded accounts from him.

It would be almost cruel to insist on this. From the extreme left to the extreme right, this passivity—this is the least that can be said—of Cardinal Van Roey in 1940 is no longer contested. If one consults the work Mourir debout! by the “resister” Demany, who became a Communist minister, one reads there (p. 42): “The Archbishop of Malines was only the pale shadow of his glorious predecessor.” If one refers to the book L’Évolution du Sentiment public en Belgique sous l’Occupation allemande by the “resister” Paul Struye, who later became a Catholic minister, one finds there again (page 27) the same disillusioned judgment: “The silence of the religious authorities in the first weeks of the war disappointed public opinion.”

On 29 May 1940, the day after the Belgian capitulation, Cardinal Van Roey had represented the invasion as a kind of gift from heaven: “Let us be persuaded,” he had written to the faithful, “that we are witnessing at this moment an exceptional action of divine Providence which manifests its power through enormous events.”

As for the attitude to be taken toward these Germans promoted to “enormous” instruments of God, not a word!

Then months had passed. Cardinal Van Roey’s pastoral letter of Sunday, 20 October 1940, thus after half a year of occupation, also carefully avoided making the slightest allusion to the possible danger that collaboration, then in full start-up, could present. It proclaimed that the Germans would certainly not oppose Belgian patriotism, they “who devote so ardent a cult to their own fatherland”! The Cardinal wrote textually: “No one can prevent you, our dear Brothers, from keeping alive in your soul the love of your fatherland, and we believe that no one would wish to prevent you.”

Thus he insisted on having affirmed from the pulpits of Truth his conviction that no German would oppose the patriotism of our people. Then in what way would collaboration have been reprehensible?

On the fidelity owed by Catholics to the “Government” of London, not a word. The Cardinal only invited souls to unite “around the King,” the King of 28 May, “on whom rest the hopes of the fatherland.”

As for those responsible for the evils of 1940 and for a moral condemnation of the invader, the Cardinal had evaded everything by laying it all, this time, on Satan, his pomps and his works: “We do not intend,” exclaimed the Cardinal, “to examine the conscience of other peoples, but let us acknowledge in all frankness and humility that our country had its share in the universal disorder: the open struggle against God, Christ, and the Church, the indifference and negligence of a very great number toward their most essential religious duties, immorality displayed publicly, the increasingly generalized violation of the holy laws of marriage and the attacks against the life of the child, of which the fact of the increasing decline in births in almost all our provinces provides the painful proof, the harsh pursuit of money, the unbridled search for pleasures, the forgetfulness of personal duties, the contempt for justice and charity in relations among citizens; all these blemishes disfigured, especially in recent years, it must be said, the traditional face of the Belgian people.”

In the end, Hitler appeared almost as the purifying instrument, providentially chastising the Belgians, concupiscent and pleasure-seeking. There remained the Cardinal’s directives. They were of the same order: “Understand the meaning of austerity, practice mortification.” How find, in all that, anti-collaborationist “directives”?

The strict truth is that the massive collaboration of Belgians—659,000 files in 1945!—was possible only because Cardinal Van Roey kept his mouth sewn shut during the historical months of this great start-up.

He dropped the Catholic collaborators like old frayed surplices when the dice were cast. But as long as there was doubt, care was taken in Malines to keep doors open, waiting to see who, Degrelle or Spaak, would advance, on day X, into the great nave of Sainte-Gudule, to attend the final Te Deum.

No doubt—knowledge of history makes one prudent—they had remembered in 1940 at the Archbishopric the precedent of the Brabant Revolution of 1789, at the beginning of which the “resistant” clergy had proclaimed from the pulpit that “to kill a Vonckist is to do a work pleasing to God,” had dragged the populace into the fight while brandishing crucifixes, had intoned on 18 December at Sainte-Gudule a solemn Te Deum to thank heaven for the expulsion of the most Christian Emperor. The Cardinal of that time, Monsignor de Franckenberg, was a Monsignor Van Roey before the letter. Yet less than a year after the Te Deum against the Emperor, there was a Te Deum in honor of the militarily restored Emperor, sung by the Cardinal Archbishop himself, quite sheepish about his adventure.

The imperial punishment was amusing, and no one died of it. It was not the same, alas, in 1944 and 1945, when the noise of the “democratic” organs of Sainte-Gudule badly covered the crash of the firing squads that struck down hundreds of those collaborators, not warned by Malines in 1940, mown down after the “Liberation” on the order of “Catholic” ministers anxious not to frighten the victors of the day.

The indecision of the religious authorities in 1940 was reflected equally in the behavior of the Catholic press.

In the provinces, the French-language Catholic sheets had for the most part long been vegetating; half of them did not pay their costs; the others were mortally boring, a clutter of bargain advertisements and display of speeches by vague little blessing politicians.

The Catholic politicians had sunk in the Limoges mess. Their propaganda newspapers therefore did not

reappear. Besides, the editors, poor penniless devils, remembered their confreres of L'Ami de l'Ordre of Namur, who, for having made that provincial sheet reappear on the order of the Bishopric and the party during German occupation No. 1, from 1914 to 1918, had found themselves dragged before the courts in 1919, condemned, covered with infamy, all abandoned, as was proper, by their former advisers! The wage-earners of the provincial Catholic press therefore stayed quiet in 1940. Most often they returned to their native hamlet, keeping cows, rubbing down calves, to the greatest profit of Agriculture, their former readers, and Belles-Lettres.

The French-language Catholic newspaper that truly counted was La Libre Belgique, formerly called Le Patriote, the traditional daily, serious, although constantly grumbling, complete, although terribly fussy, heavily written, badly presented, intellectually mediocre, but indispensable.

A Belgian priest without his Libre Belgique is as grave as a Belgian priest without cigars and old Burgundy. It is inconceivable. The Belgian is born reading La Libre Belgique. He dies reading La Libre Belgique. It is a newspaper that forms part of the furniture, like the stair rail or the radiator. This newspaper has one hundred twenty thousand subscribers. It had them a thousand years ago. In a thousand years, it will still have them.

Its publication ought therefore, at first sight, to have greatly interested the Propaganda Staffel. Yet even if it had desired it, La Libre Belgique would not have received from the occupation authorities permission to reappear. This newspaper had been the king of clandestinity during the First World War, had, from 1914 to 1918, very valiantly symbolized the resistance of Belgium—still at war—to the invader. The Germans had not forgotten this combat and had occupied the newspaper's premises as soon as they entered Brussels. The printing house had been militarized, entrusted to a German management. It produced the thousands of kilos of paper-stuff in which the occupying authorities frolicked voluptuously.

It would have been absolutely vain to try to alter this state of fact. Besides, La Libre Belgique owed it to itself to remain faithful to its past, which after 1918 had assured its success and fortune. The editors found places as best they could in private business or worked for their rag in corporative sheets edited by New Order organizations.

As for the Jourdain dynasty, owner of the enterprise, an honest race, skilful in business, full of good sense, it withdrew for four years into its shell. But this family knew its dramas of conscience, like all the others. And one Jourdain, a marvelous young boy, followed us to the Russian front, while constantly and very frankly proclaiming himself Catholic and not Rex. He fell mortally wounded high in the mountains of the Caucasus, at the end of August 1942, during the battle of Tjerjakow. He was buried along a forest road, under a mound strewn with great sunflower blossoms, before the little field hospital of the Circassian village of Schirwenskaja.

If La Libre Belgique, bound by its memories of the other invasion, did not reappear, by contrast the group of Flemish-language newspapers that corresponded to it went back to work from the first weeks of the occupation. The Standaard press company immediately adapted to circumstances, set its rotary presses turning at full output, accepted German censorship, and published in relief the most collaborationist appeals of the V.N.V. The circulation of these various newspapers reached an extremely high figure. The business, very rapidly, rolled in gold. It represented, in the autumn of 1940, such a commercial value that when the principal shareholder of Standaard came to my home, at the Drève de Lorraine, to discuss the possible sale of her shares to the Flemish Rexists, she valued her block of securities at seven million francs, which made the operation impossible for us.

The great Flemish banker Heymans, future president of Winter Relief, was watching the affair too. He negotiated in turn. But in the end the leaders of Standaard preferred to keep their collaborationist newspapers for themselves and pocket themselves the millions they brought in. That brought them considerable difficulties, because the Gestapo claimed to hold these enterprises completely.

Two-hundred-percent Catholics, pillars of the Church in Flanders, it is highly probable that these leaders would not have launched themselves into collaboration without the Cardinal not only closing his eyes, but giving them, in a whisper, a prior approval, clear and definite.

The same remark applies to the whole bundle of Catholic press, in French and in Flemish, of the Abbey of Averbode. The good Premonstratensian Fathers were very strictly supervised by Malines, especially since the financial setbacks they had known. All their weeklies reappeared, authorized both by the Propaganda Staffel and by the Archbishopric.

Even the very old Revue générale, the most important of the Belgian Catholic reviews, a kind of Revue des Deux Mondes of the Low Countries, made desperate efforts to be admitted by the Germans. These steps did not succeed, because the Militärverwaltung, possessing only very limited paper stocks, granted authorizations only drop by drop. Nevertheless the steps were conducted with great insistence, not by some administrator of the review, but by Count Louis de Lichtervelde, who had been the intimate collaborator of the Catholic prime minister Count de Broqueville. Lichtervelde, a funny old stammering gentleman, with cheeks like deflated pig bladders, but a first-rate historian, super-patriot, super-royalist, and... super-Malines man, constantly returned to the charge with the Militärverwaltung. The list of collaborators he presented to the occupation authorities included the whole Catholic intelligentsia of Belgium.

On this subject, I recall a very funny story. It concerns the launching of a Christian-Democratic daily, obviously collaborationist, directed by a deputy from Charleroi who had often caused talk about himself, the lawyer Jean Bodart. This Bodart, always badly washed, spreading a smell of asarabacca, had a swollen head of gray marzipan, speckled with blackish fly-droppings, jam-maker’s sticky hands, the bearing of a docker. We had faced each other in 1936 in his very city, during a contradictory meeting that was sensational: in three hours I had taken away four fifths of his troops.

The fellow had the misfortune one day to amuse the caricaturist of Le Pays réel, Paul Jamin, better known under the name Jam, unique in all Europe for his talent, his fantasy, and his smiling ferocity. Jam had, absolutely by chance, observed him from the top of the press gallery in the Chamber of Deputies. Bodart’s grasseying speech was so disorderly that it inspired in Jam, that very evening, a drawing of marvelous lunacy. Jam, with the prescience of the artist, had, without suspecting it, reached the subconscious of his victim: the lunatic he had drawn was a lunatic who did not know himself as such and whom everyone ignored as such. Jam’s fairly innocent caricature was the injection that stimulated the fellow’s madness, latent until then. Week by week the symptoms of cerebral derangement became more evident in him.

Paul de Mont, senator of Rex, a horrified observer of the virus’s progression, had tried to reason with our Jam. But the latter, with joyful obstinacy, continued, imperturbable, to sketch Bodart gamboling on the grass, a canary cage in his hand, a boot on his head, checkered trousers on his shoulder blades.

One afternoon, Bodart mounted the tribune of the Chamber, his enormous head of a greasy Robespierre more earthy than ever. It was felt at once that the catastrophe was there. President Kamiel Huysmans

tumbled down from his perch, went from bench to bench begging the opposition to put up with everything, not to interrupt. The interpellator, very obviously completely mad, launched grandiloquent words, uttered unintelligible remarks. He spoke for nearly two hours, before a silent and dismayed assembly. He descended from the tribune, streaming, white with foam, his hair raised in great black locks. His party applauded him, out of pity, and so that he would not in addition indulge in some fatal eccentricity. He might perfectly well have suddenly swallowed the ushers' medals or removed the Prime Minister's trousers. That very evening, he was taken to a clinic for the insane, and no one heard of him again until the occupation of 1940.

Going one fine morning to the printing house of L'Écho de la Bourse to examine estimates concerning the printing of our daily, I came face to face—his was protuberant and freckled like a large moldy strawberry—with the said Jean Bodart. He was free, without a shoe on the back of his head, without checkered trousers, but his bell was more cracked than ever. He occupied part of the building. He noisily dragged me into it, not without first having embraced me effusively, wetting my face from one ear to the other. The walls of his office were papered with all the articles in which I had thrashed him in 1935 and 1936; Jam's drawings ran over the walls like friezes. Bodart, in heaven amid these trophies, had become a thundering champion of National Socialism!

He brandished an authorization, duly signed, furnished with all the German stamps, to publish a daily. What could he have told the Sonderführers of the Propaganda Staffel? In any case, he was feverishly preparing his first issue. His brother assisted him. Democratic priests, plump, rosy, chattering, tumbled through the corridors like fat shining rats, extremely busy, bursting with pride beside their great man. The latter proposed, in a renewal of effusions, to come dine at my home. Sick with laughter, bent double, we had all the trouble in the world shaking off this nuisance.

Bodart's ecclesiastical team had abundant funds. The printing house of L'Écho de la Bourse did not have to worry about the rest. It was paid. It composed Bodart's lucubrations, true Dadaist poems to Hitler's glory. When the galley proofs had been corrected, frightful howls filled the building. A new crisis had just broken out! The head of the Christian-Democratic press had to return posthaste to his straitjackets and shower-baths, while the little black and pink priests scattered, distressed, in the Rue des Houblons, their stillborn articles at the bottom of their large pockets.

But it was not only mad Christian Democrats who looked sideways toward collaboration. There were others who had all their good sense and who rushed, as if seized by magnets, to meet the presumed collaborationist personalities on whom they counted to satisfy their ambitions.

This was the case of Paul Tschoffen, the former Christian-Democratic minister from Liège, teammate in Brussels of the Freemason minister Lippens.

He was a revenant. Intelligent, acrobatic, eager for money, he had embarked, like so many of his colleagues, in politico-finance. The Banque Chaudoir, of which he was a director, had blown up. Tschoffen had got out of that bad spot only by prodigies of balancing. But he had been marked by that collapse.

He had, however, recovered his strength. He was seen imposing his presence at all the Christian-Democratic congresses, his head carved like a carrot, his porcelain eyes, his pointed skull gleaming like Val-Saint-Lambert crystal.

His trip to the Congo, as Minister of Colonies, had finished sinking him among his virtuous voters.

With the demon of the equator helping, he had, it seems, taken a very special vigorous interest in certain problems that did not especially fall under political strategy. If malicious tongues are to be believed, he had gone very deeply into his subject.

Tschoffen was a hearty fellow. It is possible that nothing human remained foreign to him during this warm study trip... No doubt these were only doddering tales due to impotent bigots or stale virgins. Nevertheless the blow had landed. A second time, Tschoffen was marked.

The typhoon of Limoges, engulfing in shame nine tenths of the Catholic politicians in 1940, appeared to Tschoffen a unique opportunity to set out forward again. And a brand-new Tschoffen, like a caiman finding another skin, came out of the mud again, went down to Brussels, harassed the Royal Palace with his offers. He was received by the Sovereign who, officially captive, received no politician. After this interview, Tschoffen, burning the stages, bombarded the Palace with letters and notes in order to decide Leopold III, after having been liberated by Hitler, to constitute with all urgency—in agreement with the occupiers, of course—a "national" government of which, it went without saying, Tschoffen would have been the most sublime ornament!

The essential mission that Tschoffen assigned to this new ministerial team was reconciliation with the Third Reich: "It will be permissible and desirable," Tschoffen wrote pompously on 8 July 1940 to the head of the King's Cabinet, "that a new government be constituted to assume with the King the exercise of legislative powers (by application of the law of 7 September 1935) and executive powers, to watch over the maintenance of order, provide for urgent necessities, and sign the indispensable treaties to put an end to the state of war."

That was "resistance"! As relentless as Lippens, feeling like him, in June and July 1940, that it was the occasion or never to try Power again, he tirelessly excited the Sovereign to engage in acts of high constitutional acrobatics.

The Pierlots and the Spaaks had to resign! If they did not go of themselves, the King had to liquidate them! Tschoffen pushed his eagerness so far as to indicate in a "Note" for the King (26 June 1940) the procedure to follow. The proposed formula is of an amusing Jesuitism: "If the ministers in office," he wrote, "do not wish or are unable to send the King an offer of resignation, a decree could be taken—and countersigned by the member of the Government who is in Brussels—stating that as a result of circumstances of force majeure, the ministers who are abroad are cut off from communications with the country and unable to exercise their functions; that it is urgent to put an end to this situation which, if prolonged, would threaten the country in its vital interests; consequently, appoints in replacement of the current ministers..."

The "member of the Government who is in Brussels" was another Christian-Democratic minister named Delfosse, a starched simpleton, pedant, illiterate petty lawyer, dressed and perfumed like a society dancer. This fellow, in the great rout of May 1940, had been cut off from his colleagues, emptied out of his ministerial car by the retreating Tommies, left on the road, in shirtsleeves, comically pushing his files in a child's pram. Before the war, he had been the No. 1 antifascist of the Catholic Party. That did not in any way prevent him from flying toward collaboration on the day after the disaster and putting the whole personnel of the Belgian National Broadcasting Institute (I.N.R.) at the service of German radio in Brussels! Delfosse had teamed up with Tschoffen, was ready, from June 1940, to sign the decree that would throw his dear colleagues out the window and carry "collaboration" to power.

To finish convincing the Sovereign, Tschoffen used, without scruples, like Lippens, blackmail by fright.

Lippens explained at the Palace that the Germans were furious that there was not yet a collaborationist government in Brussels. Tschoffen, for his part, played upon the pressure of "opinion": "Liège opinion in particular," he wrote to the Palace, "has wholly rallied to this idea (the constitution of a government). Public opinion is unanimous in desiring that Belgium be, without delay, submitted to the authority of a national government. This feeling is that of the bourgeoisie. It is also that of the working class that has remained faithful to Belgium."

This gibberish not having particularly overwhelmed the King, the former Christian-Democratic minister Tschoffen and the former Freemason minister Lippens, seeking to rely all the same on a somewhat broader formula, having furthermore realized the sympathies we enjoyed with Leopold III, rushed toward us, heart on sleeve, tears in their eyes, loving us, cherishing us, adoring us!

As early as July, Lippens, believing me dead, threw his arms around Pierre Daye's neck. In August, I resurrected! My return put these gentlemen into wild agitation, triggered the great maneuver that was going to end, a few days later, in the written conclusions of Lippens's famous "Study Center."

Tschoffen would be, with Lippens, the principal illustration of those historic meetings of 20 and 27 August 1940, during which politicians and magistrates of the old regime were going to decide to burn the democracy they had adored, to adore the authoritarianism they had burned, and... to open fraternally their arms and their hearts to the leaders of Rex and the V.N.V., to Messrs. Elias and Degrelle.

Tschoffen, the former democratic minister Tschoffen, did not demand this alliance with the "fascists" in a moment of enthusiasm or wandering. No. It was a plan studied coldly, discussed at length by those concerned, a plan that won unanimity among them and that they took the trouble to put down on paper. The text of this procès-verbal was personally approved by Tschoffen, present at the ceremony, as it was by his teammates, without a single exception.

This priceless document has happily been preserved. If such texts could not be produced in black and white, there would no doubt be people unwilling to believe in the duplicity of the Lippenses and Tschoffens, having seen them swell their chests so proudly in 1944, during the "democratic" reconquest.

Here is the conclusion of this masterpiece: "In the light of events, it is appropriate to create a directed economy and to strengthen the executive... We must coordinate our work around certain truths that events have shown to be evident and on which depends the organization of a new order.

"The conception of democracy is surpassed.

"We must appeal to all layers of the population. Those currently represented at the Study Center represent it only too narrowly. We must appeal to the V.N.V. and the Rexists, to Messrs. Elias and Degrelle."

Tschoffen's and his gang's dream failed because I did not answer the written offer that Lippens sent me. It failed because Hitler did not rally, at Berchtesgaden, to Leopold III's proposal in favor of Lippens. It was not the desire to associate that had been lacking in Tschoffen. What he lacked, solely, was the agreement of the partners he had believed he had found in us.

On 6 December 1940 still, Tschoffen and his Freemason colleagues, gathered once more in Brussels, reaffirmed without batting an eyelid their plan of constitutional upheaval and their desire to collaborate with the V.N.V. and the Rexists, with “Messrs. Elias and Degrelle.”

Only when all hope was irretrievably lost and after months of fruitless maneuvers did the former Christian-Democratic minister, with prodigious nerve, provoke in a provincial courtroom an incident which he hoped would serve later to clear him.

This local incident was to permit Tschoffen to pass into the London camp. There, accustomed to the Marcel-Henri Jaspars and the Kamiel Huysmanses, people had learned not to examine too closely the morality of the extras to whom they resorted.

1 One cannot reread without smiling the peremptory counsels Tschoffen sent to the Palace of Laeken in July 1940: “Peace being concluded, it will be necessary to concern oneself with providing Belgium with the political, economic, and social institutions required by the new state of things... I emphasize, while insisting upon it, the favorably envisaged eventuality of organizing a plebiscite that could mark the will of the Nation to entrust to the King, under the countersignature of his ministers, legislative power without any limit other than that of its duration. It is not impossible that one day it will be necessary to come to giving the Nation the opportunity to express its will to revise profoundly and rapidly institutions that have proved themselves, but that have also had their day.”

At the moment when Tschoffen was capering in order to collaborate with “Messrs. Elias and Degrelle,” another Catholic politician, a Flemish deputy, had accepted the modest functions of mayor of the city of Ronse. His name was Vindevogel. He was a brave man, often excited, then waving his long arms in the void, but good-natured, and father of a whole string of eleven children.

He was, in the history of the collaboration of Belgian Catholics, the donkey that mows in the grass of the embankment the length of a tongue and pays the breakage on behalf of the more powerful animals.

Tschoffen returned from London in 1944, decorated, starred, promoted to operetta general. Parading, making a racket, paragon of super-civism, he allowed himself the luxury of hunting down “collaborators” and the honor of being their executioner.

Poor Vindevogel, the little provincial deputy who had done a hundred times less, obviously, than Tschoffen had dreamed of doing, was thrown into prison at the “Liberation.” Despite his eleven children, he was shot like a dog in 1945. The turncoat Tschoffen, meanwhile, admired in his mirror the decorations and epaulettes that the war had earned him.

Such is the highly moral epilogue of Catholic collaboration.

XIII

THE PRESS AND COLLABORATION

Immediate reappearance of the Flemish press. - La Légia. - Gazette de Charleroi and Journal de Charleroi. - The collaboration of the Freemason Heenen. - The false Nation belge. - Neuray-Veldekens proposals. - The false Soir. - Moromati and de Becker. - Le Pays réel, a free daily. - In a blue salon, with Marie-Thérèse Rossel. - Her list to the Propaganda Staffel. - The candidacy of Désiré Denuit. -

The drunkard Frédéric Denis. - Lévy, candidate editor at Le Pays réel.

As German panzers hammered with their tracks the sunny fields of Limburg and Brabant, in May 1940, the editors of most Belgian French-language newspapers fled toward Paris or the Côte d'Azur.

Many thought of resuming their activity there. Memories of the other war haunted the fugitives. They remembered that La Nation belge had been, for several years, a remarkable daily in Paris before settling on Place de Brouckère in Brussels.

Certain Belgian journalists—with or without particles in their names—feared the seizure by the Germans of documents unfortunately revealing: they were particularly agile on the roads of the Midi, in no way wishing to be summoned to give explanations about the confidential subsidies they had received from the French Second Bureau, in remuneration for the secret reports in which they had amiably denounced, to the police of Daladier and Gamelin, their political friends, their dear confreres, even their friends tout court.

La Meuse, of Liège, for example, had reappeared for a few days on the banks of the Seine, then in the South.

The last Belgian rockets were fired in the Gazette de Toulouse by the inenarrable Louis Piérard, called Pied-Rare.

Piérard, an old jeering hack, was Socialist deputy for Mons, in Hainaut. Ten times he had believed he would become minister. Ten times, the shot had missed. A mediocre orator, but flowery and good-natured, his lips would edge themselves with a strange thread of white drool as soon as he had undertaken a speech. He wrote, which was more serious, and pinched French in order to play at being a Paname writer. He gave birth to laborious travel narratives whose constant banality he heightened by stuffing his text with words evoking colors: white, blue, green, violet. He had a special taste for the word orange, no doubt because his face evoked the bottom of a basket of overripe mandarins.

This little color trick had taken. At the Brussels Socialist daily Le Peuple, where the Koulishers and other handsome blond Aryans were studiously learning grammatical construction, Piérard's daubed prose won the easy success of fairground chromolithographs. Piérard had industrialized his patent; he scraped together enough money; he had married his daughters to well-off bourgeois. He wore a dinner jacket like a butcher's boy, but he adored walking at Embassy receptions the rare feet that assured him his livelihood.

Everyone looked fixedly at his hands, with an unhealthy curiosity, since Jam had begun to draw of him caricatures as marvelous as they were pitiless in which, always, a broad flat foot came out of the sleeve, the penholder between the toes. No matter what one did, one could not see the model without thinking of these attributes. Some, pursued in Piérard's presence by this evocation, suddenly felt their hearts turn over...

Piérard did not take offense at so little and made maximum use of his tools. Touching everything, he published literary chronicles—in poetry, feet count—painting criticism—full-length portraits—playing even at Léon Daudet when he meddled with cuisine—putting his foot in it. In 1940, he was the last fugitive Belgian journalist who ceased to consider himself in France on a war footing. Piérard was conscious of his gifts. But the French armistice obliged him to dismount. More than anyone, he had strings tied to his feet. For four years, there remained for him only to cool his heels on the Côte d'Azur.

The Germans, pouring through Belgium, had therefore found empty editorial rooms everywhere, except in the Flemish country.

There, influence had been divided up rapidly. The V.N.V. installed themselves at Antwerp, in the requisitioned printing house of Kamiel Huysmans's Socialist newspaper: there they printed, in black and red, a Volk en Staat full of dynamite, which the public tore from one another in Flanders, in Brussels, and in Germany, in the Belgian prisoner camps. De Man, for his part, had reserved to himself the Socialist daily of Ghent, Vooruit, which had become more National Socialist than the Völkischer Beobachter. The Catholics had placed at the service of the New Order and of collaboration the powerful press network of Standaard, printed in Brussels on Boulevard Émile Jacqmain. The so-called neutral Dutch-language press, that is to say with capital and directors generally Freemasonic, had reappeared too, in Brussels, almost immediately.

Each Flemish tendency thus had its daily and its "living space." One would have thought oneself at the amicable settlement of an unforeseen family inheritance.

The French press, by contrast, had found itself totally abandoned, but not for long.

The Germans had entered Liège on the third day of hostilities, descending toward the Palace of the Prince-Bishops by the main road from Tongeren, while the enthusiastic crowd, believing in the arrival of Queen Wilhelmina's intrepid warriors, exhausted its lungs crying around them: "Long live the Dutch!"

Liège possessed before 10 May 1940 several newspapers: La Wallonie, a substitute for Le Peuple of Brussels; La Gazette de Liège, an indigestible Catholic sheet, badly printed on a strange pinkish paper, directed by a kind of old Romanian Jew, hairy, with a red nose all lumpy, swollen like a gourd, legally named Demarteau, but known to the people of Liège under the name Barbe-à-Poux; finally La Meuse, well equipped, an instrument of French and Havas propaganda, but appearing in such a format that one could have papered, with a single issue, the walls of the waiting room at Guillemins station.

The Germans, in twenty-four hours, set rolling on the splendid rotary presses of this newspaper a paper of identical presentation which they baptized La Légia. An agent of the Reich, vaguely Bulgarian, pulled the strings. The first employee who came along had, on the spot, accumulated all functions: editor-in-chief, military editor, sports editor, accountant, compositor, proofreader, packer, and dispatcher.

The newspaper, badly made, often badly written, lifeless, enjoyed a monopoly that assured it an astronomical circulation, such as no Liège daily had ever known. It was never possible to chip away at the privileges of this fortress. The superficial observer might have been astonished by it. Everything was explained when one learned that behind certain Belgian straw men were camouflaged robust Germans, owners, under the table, of the majority of the company's shares. They watched the grain, strangled every project of competition, and were constantly on the lookout.

The receipts, one can imagine, were prodigious. But this was no longer journalism, it was colonial management. It lasted throughout the war, making a serious press effort impossible in the Liège country.

The seizure secretly carried out by various Germans over the great Belgian newspapers corresponded

even more, I think, to a political idea than to the desire, real as well, to rake in plump profits. Certain police organizations in Berlin, very influential, maneuvered constantly to prevent any New Order political group—whatever it might be—from exercising predominant influence in Belgium. The press, radio, cinema are essential instruments for conquering opinion. Cinema and radio immediately became all-powerful fiefs of Reich Propaganda. Native elements were never admitted there except exceptionally. There remained the press, where invisible Germans cut out the lion's share for themselves, not only in Liège, where they took everything, but elsewhere, where they took the essential part.

The second journalistic center of Wallonia was Charleroi. Before the war two moribund little Catholic sheets were issued there, Le Pays wallon and Le Rappel, with insignificant circulation; a fairly widespread Socialist daily, Le Journal de Charleroi; finally a high-circulation liberal, sectarian sheet, bastion of Freemasonry in Hainaut, La Gazette de Charleroi, idiotic but extremely read—because idiotic—and stuffed with classified advertisements.

Le Pays wallon and Le Rappel gave up, at the arrival of the Germans, a breath that for a long time already had been scarcely perceptible.

Le Journal de Charleroi passed, in one evening, from socialism to National Socialism and to de Manism.

As for La Gazette de Charleroi, it was fairly soon taken over, at the instigation of the Germans, by vague unknowns whose literary work resembled the chewing of pebbles more than journalism. They raked in everything: the title, the matériel, the local correspondents, not forgetting the bed and the mistress of the former Freemason boss, which were adjudicated to the successors with the stock.

These two sheets also earned enormous sums of money, expanded as far as the Namur and Tournai regions, publishing regional substitutes in a Malagasy style as pure as that of the mother house.

During the war it was never possible to know who the real material beneficiaries of these operations were. But the Germans must have known the bottom of the story, for there, as in Liège, extremely favorable artificial fogs veiled the financial maneuvers and the political maneuvers until the last day.

For a long time this press was sullenly hostile to us, to Rex and to me, supporting to the hilt the annexationist movements visibly directed by certain police mafias of the Reich, rallying to our European and national effort only when our heroes and our dead of the Eastern Front had imposed on everyone, police included, respect for our ideal.

This collaborationist press of Hainaut had as its No. 1 star, in 1940, the most relentless francophile journalist in the country, one Paul Heenen, who before the war had been elected, thanks to the support of the Lodges, president of the Belgian Press Association. No one had more violently mishandled the Germans during the winter of neutrality, in the Ghent daily La Flandre libérale. No one became a more decided partisan of the "New Order" once Hitler was victorious. He and his new teammates had been covered by one of the biggest vegetables of Belgian Freemasonry, the Liberal senator Catteau, who remained senator after 1945. He had hastened to send congratulations to the director: "I have learned," he wrote to him on 12 July 1940, "that you have made the Gazette de Charleroi reappear. I congratulate you on having taken this initiative. I have not left Brussels. That is to say that I am well placed to appreciate the timeliness of your decision."

Among the Three-Points, everything is shadowy. In 1944 and 1945, dozens of small fry from the press were condemned to death. But the Freemason Heenen, who had written in a newspaper entirely devoted to the service of the Germans, was troubled by no one! It was necessary to wait until the end of 1946 for him to deign to leave the Press Association. He was still a member of it two years after the "Liberation"!

There is no other explanation than their membership in Masonry for the impunity, as astounding as it is scandalous, of the Lippenses, Devèzes, Cornils, Fredericqs, Heenens. But the Lodges were, it must be acknowledged, otherwise more courageous than a certain Archbishopric, for they never ceased to cover their own.

In Brussels, two French-language newspapers, La Nation belge and Le Soir, rapidly saw the light of day again.

La Nation belge reappeared as soon as the capital fell, but a rigged Nation belge, using the articles and drawings abandoned on the composing stone by the last editors, directed by a handful of shady operators who, from the first day, offered their services to the invader.

The crowd, anxious to read news, rushed upon this improvised sheet, without style or meaning. It was Nazified hack-work. In the office of the unforgettable Fernand Neuray, the greatest journalist, with Paul Colin, that Belgium has known, adventurers had installed themselves. The Germans took what they found. The important thing for them was to reestablish as soon as possible the appearances of normal life in the cities they occupied. Brussels without a newspaper would no longer have been Brussels. But Fernand Neuray must have turned in his grave!

The Germans were not blind. La Nation belge, under this new incarnation, lived scarcely a few weeks.

From the end of August 1940, negotiations had been engaged so that the true Nation belge might reappear.

At this news one must not put on little frightened airs, tear one's clothes, and cry blasphemy. I have always felt for the two generations of Neurays a deep sympathy. Fernand Neuray was from my country. I was still a young philosophy student at the University of Louvain when the director of La Nation belge was already inviting me to his table in the company of my master and friend Monsignor Picard, another wild boar come out of our great woods. Before the war, I maintained the best relations with the Neuray sons. Their newspaper, more than once, backed me strongly. But I am tracing here the panorama of Belgian collaboration. It is impossible to hide that the Neurays, like so many others, were ready to reissue their newspaper, in agreement with the occupier, in the autumn of 1940.

Their spokesman in this affair was one of my former professors at the University of Louvain, the jurist Veldekens, a man as capable as he was learned. Professor Veldekens did a great deal to reach a solution; his liaison agent with the Militärverwaltung was the lawyer of the German embassy in Brussels, Maître Ledoux.

There was no harm in that. Better would have been a dignified, patriotic, well-written Nation belge, instead of the dirty paper that, each morning, dishonored a fine title.

The Neuray-Veldekens proposals, then the approaches of Maître Veldekens alone, tending to create a great Catholic newspaper to which, it seems, Mr. Paul Struye himself, future Minister of Justice, would

have collaborated, failed one and all, not because the applicants were seized by remorse, but because Paul Colin, returned from the concentration camp of Le Vernet, more subtle, more insinuating, knew how to obtain from the Germans that they eliminate La Nation belge, whatever its direction, to make room for the "newspaper of his life," Le Nouveau Journal, which he created on 1 October 1940, strong with the moral support of important civil and military personalities attached by their functions to the Palace of Laeken, strong also with a "loan" of five hundred thousand francs granted to him, not by Leopold III personally, as has been written, but by a very enterprising personage who touched very closely upon the Sovereign and his family.

A little after the ersatz Nation belge there also appeared a camouflaged Soir. There reigned, pontificated, in the summer of 1940, an extraordinary foreigner, with a singing voice, square shoulders, bright ties, fine silk handkerchiefs, and heady perfumes. He had the air of a manager of special houses destined by their purpose to bring people together.

No one knew where he came from. He called himself Greek. His name was Moromati. The Brussels Rexists who were not imprisoned, and notably my brother-in-law Charles Raty, having refused to set Le Soir in motion again, it was this Moromati who received the order, after having, like a good Oriental, distributed much-appreciated "baksheesh."

Since this Moromati could not decently publish articles in Greek or Turkish in Le Soir, the German embassy attached to him the former thurifer of Paul-Henri Spaak, Raymond De Becker.

An anxious nature, holding everything, physically and morally, from the Israelite, moist hands, thick lips, astonishing soft lips of a whitened African, intelligent, but with a complex, morbid intelligence, swept by mystical crises to the point of having wanted to create a new lay-religious order, then falling back into nihilism, De Becker was a pathological unsatisfied man.

Politically, he had given himself to too many masters: to Spaak, to de Man, to van Zeeland, to Dr. Liebe.

The Germans thought they held him well. He was their colt for a long time. Yet he gave them the slip when he felt the winds from the East grow cooler. He then tried, but too late, to build himself a file for the defense, in anticipation of the return of his ex-friends in London. As is the rule in such cases, his panic and double game served only to make him receive blows from both sides. The occupation authorities, having seized one of his little anti-German papers, rather well made besides, shut him up in a château in the Reich; he returned to the country in 1945 only to get himself locked up in another château, that of Saint-Gilles prison, less comfortable certainly than the Nazi burg.

All Brussels, all Belgium being for collaboration at that moment, Le Soir, although a Greco-Turk lit it with his torch, was submerged under the avalanche of candidate editors. Former collaborators of the house, who had remained in Brussels, came running belly to the ground to recover their places. A few Rexists, too hasty, imprudently advanced onto the golden bridges offered them. Personalities from every milieu brought baskets of copy. Professor Ganshof, of the University of Ghent, an excellent historian—not to be confused with the shady Ganshof of State Security—rubbed shoulders with Xavier de Grünne who, his arm shattered by a German bullet a few weeks earlier, caring neither for the Syrian metics of the house nor for the rather special friends of Dr. Liebe, occupied the ground so as not to leave it to others. Xavier de Grünne, impetuous and pure as a torrent, who lived only for the service of the fatherland and the King, and whose brother was Grand Master of the Queen's Household, had not, one can well think, engaged his name, his responsibility, and his honor without having asked and

received from the Palace a formal approval.

Moromati, elegant, his hair curled, streaming with Coty or Houbigant, gave himself too soon to the delights of conquest. He believed himself forever undisputed lord of the Belgian press. His supple, long limousine conducted him from chic restaurant to chic restaurant. Meanwhile, little De Becker, ferreting, toes askew, was secretly gnawing at the legs of his armchair. The affair of the "baksheesh," carried from Dienststelle to Dienststelle, made its way. One evening, Moromati wished to sit as usual at his director's desk. He flattened himself with a great crash. The work had been well done. Two Gestapo inspectors picked him up. Greece, Turkey, Syria went into mourning. But Moro disappeared, at first a prisoner, then volatilized.

On my leave in 1944, after the encirclement of Cherkassy, going down one evening to the bar of my hotel in Paris, I perceived in a mirror Moromati's flat face. He was perched on a high red stool and was drinking a bottle of champagne, all by himself. He was still as perfumed, as princely dressed. What had his adventures been since his passage as a meteor through the Rue Royale, in the house of the Rossel family? He was rolling in gold. It was plain to see.

In half an hour he ordered a second bottle, then a third, which he emptied, always as dignified, as elegant, as solitary, high on his chrome perch. No doubt he was dreaming of De Becker, arrested in turn, for his smile seemed animated by divine joys.

Recreating the Rexist daily, Le Pays réel, in such promiscuity had not failed to preoccupy me.

In June, the occupation authorities had sent to the administration of Rex an authorization to appear that was almost an invitation. At the end of July, the authorization was still there, unused. It had this good point: it would spare me any visit and any request to the Propaganda Staffel if, after having received a favorable opinion from the King, I finally decided to relaunch our newspaper.

The King's opinion was communicated to me on 21 August. It was affirmative. For me, from then on, my opinion was made. It was precisely because many newspapers had reappeared, in May and June, in a shady atmosphere, poisoned by obscure compromises, that it was necessary to give the public a clean newspaper, patriotic through and through and free from any interference on the occupier's part.

The French-language press of Brussels and the provinces, practically without exception, was printed on presses stolen from their legal owners. It would have been easy for us to resort to similar facilities.

Yet we alone, absolutely alone, took care not to profit from these spoliations. We were poorer than ever. But we asked the German authorities neither for premises, nor for a pfennig, nor for the use of a machine. We did not even wish to claim the paper that belonged to us, so cavalierly requisitioned by the Propaganda Staffel and never paid for by it, on which the first issues of the false Nation belge had been printed in the month of June.

I myself went to discuss the terms of a printing contract with the manager of the Imifi company, at L'Écho de la Bourse, a contract exactly similar to our contracts before the war. We rented a few empty rooms for our editorial services. Not a German put the tip of his nose into this negotiation. We obtained from Imifi one month's credit, to allow us to settle our invoices according to our commercial receipts. We did not have ten thousand francs before us when, after four months of silence, the first issue of the resurrected Pays réel came out.

I can reread with pride the proclamation that appeared in it under my signature. Since the Belgian capitulation it was the first cry of national pride and hope. I called Belgians to rebuild the country, in honor, in understanding, and in fidelity. Le Pays réel reappeared, free. I had neither asked nor received the slightest instruction. To have my elbows free, I had paid no visit, even purely formal, to any of the German personalities of the press services. I knew none of the leaders of the Propaganda Staffel.

At once, among the Germans, I had made for myself the reputation of a determined man. My silence in August had astonished them. My leading article, of vibrant and intransigent nationalism, floored them. But no censor risked asking me for the slightest modification or making the slightest criticism, even in a low voice.

I had taken all my precautions to avoid committing myself in a blind alley. I no longer wished to assume personally the responsibility for the newspaper. Le Pays réel reappeared with the masthead: Léon Degrelle, founder. I had ceased to be its director. Thus I would not have to engage in possible discussions with foreign subordinates, at a moment when whatever prestige I might have would perhaps be necessary for more important debates, those in which Belgium's fate would be settled.

Le Pays réel achieved a very lively success; its circulation was triple and even quadruple that which it had known during the winter of 1939.

Our daily, unfortunately, represented in the autumn of 1940 only about a tenth of the circulation of the French-language press of our country. The big piece was Le Soir, a true "Belgian national institution," the Germans said. It was by that means that action on opinion would have been truly effective.

I knew that, parallel to the Neuray-Veldekens approaches aiming to make the true Nation belge reappear, urgent approaches to the Germans were being undertaken by Mlle Rossel personally in order to obtain an authorization for the authentic Le Soir, of which she owned three quarters of the shares.

Marie-Thérèse Rossel, then about thirty years old—the perfect age for women—was, although she was said to be of weak health, a young woman magnificently built, with long legs and a grave and fresh face. She undertook to go in person to the Rue de la Loi, into General Reeder's offices, to the German officials of the press services.

These men, accustomed to receiving Brussels Greco-Turks or heavy second-hand dealers with grasseying speech from Liège or the Black Country, were delighted by these visits, which brought grace, youth, and delicate perfumes into the dusty offices they occupied.

The idea of an authentic Soir became full of attractions in their eyes. Its shares rose with each new visit from the skilful huntress. The young officer specially charged with studying the question, troubled as Germans can be, dreamers, sentimental men, sons of the Rhine with romantic castles and waters moiréed by the moon, came to desire these visits as if he were waiting on his rock for the Lorelei with golden hair. This beautiful girl had made him crazy. Teased by the offices, he was relieved of his functions and sent in disgrace to the other end of the continent.

The project, nevertheless, came within a hair of success. Everyone had been mobilized to this end, Rexists in the lead. Pierre Daye, very particularly, had been called to the rescue by Mlle Rossel, invited to her home several times, informed of the proposals made by her to the Germans and asked to support them. I myself took tea one afternoon with Marie-Thérèse Rossel, in order to examine with her how the reconquest of her newspaper could be carried out and how I could help her in it.

Here again, as in the Neuray case, it would be ridiculous and vain to play the prude. It was so. Marie-Thérèse Rossel saw the Germans. She saw Pierre Daye, inviting him to her home with relentless gentleness. She saw Léon Degrelle, took tea with him in the ravishing blue and silver boudoir of one of her most gracious friends.

Preparatory approaches? Not at all! The offers were formal! And they were written. Marie-Thérèse Rossel showed me, as she had shown Pierre Daye, the list of editors she proposed for the Germans' approval. She took back half of the De Becker team and amalgamated it with the best elements of the newspaper's old team. She put forward as editor-in-chief a talented Antwerp man, gentle, with a singing manner of speaking, lisping a little: Désiré Denuit. I still see his name, written at the top of the list.

Désiré Denuit was an old friend of mine, editor at Le Soir for several years. He was goodness itself, delicate, not fanatical for a sou. The choice was perfect. I supported him with all my strength.

After the war, Le Soir distinguished itself by its hunt for collaborators. It is always the same thing: the more one wanted to collaborate, the more one was required to shine in anti-collaborationism...

The beautiful Marie-Thérèse Rossel took tea with me, explained to me what she had proposed to the Germans so as to be able, in her recovered Soir, to collaborate with them; she herself offered, in writing, to fish back half the dubious fish that the Propaganda Staffel had thrown into her newspaper's pond. I was then, in her eyes, the most agreeable—or the most useful—of companions, opposite whom one nibbled biscuits while crossing and uncrossing long harmonious legs. But, in the Soir that we wanted to save together, the same goddess allowed people to demand at the top of their lungs, in 1945 and 1946, that I be shot, hanged, disemboweled, stoned! Come now, dear friend, what did we do together? Was it not you who were ready, much more than I, to "collaborate"? For my part, I was not in the mood, you know, to take into my newspaper half a dozen tested agents of German propaganda. Who was running to make graces in the Rue de la Loi, at the Militärverwaltung? It was a matter, I do not doubt, before anything else, of recovering a business capable of assuring each month a million francs of profits.

Marie-Thérèse Rossel was a candidate for collaboration; her editors were too. Their elegant patroness had gathered them before acting. All marched along, including dear Désiré Denuit, round face, blinking eyes, "collabos" in advance, rejoicing, impatient to get back to work.

It was De Becker who derailed the train. He had not unbolted Moromati in order to let Denuit steal his place. For if Marie-Thérèse Rossel took De Becker back, it was only as managing editor, a not negligible position nevertheless. But Denuit, a proven journalist—while De Becker was only an amateur, almost a beginner—would have been the editor-in-chief.

De Becker did not accept stepping down again. He made full use of the supports he possessed at the Reich embassy.

Without this crisis of thwarted ambition on Raymond De Becker's part, dear Marie-Thérèse Rossel, shorn like a bowl, would have known in September 1944 the dungeons of Saint-Gilles, after having been vigorously and patriotically raped by the valiant democratic "Fifis." And the seraphic friend Désiré would have sadly ended his days, nose pinched, before a double row of gendarmes.

That is how it is. Virtue is generally only a matter of opportunity. And it was to a grain of sand that the rejected ones of Le Soir owed remaining politically virgin.

To console good Désiré Denuit, I will add that his case was the case of many other journalists. The same farce befell an always wine-soaked firebrand of the Socialist press, the named Denis Frédéric, editor of Le Peuple before the war and... after the war.

Until 10 May 1940, this garbage man had each day poured cartloads of filth over Hitler and National Socialism. Of asinine stupidity, the Ostrogoth ran to throw himself at the feet of the victorious Germans, pestering them, breaking their heads, hoping to obtain from them the ability to reissue a Peuple cooked in National Socialist sauce. The Propaganda Staffel sent him packing.

It is the same rebuffed collaborationist—to his great despair at the time—who wrote with a vengeful pen, in 1945, a book entitled The Press in the Service of Hitlerism! The only thing missing from this book is an autobiographical chapter.

Shall I say, to finish, that I knew an Israelite journalist who was a candidate for collaboration? His name was Lévy.

Well then, in September 1940, three long months after the Germans entered Brussels, this Lévy wrote to me, overflowing with conviction and zeal. His letter was incandescent. Victor Meulenijzer, of Le Pays réel, had the mania for filing away little papers. He had preserved the letter from this unexpected National Socialist, and he sent it to me on the Estonian front, in September 1944, before himself falling into the claws of the “liberators.” Lévy, in this epistle, assured me of his patriotic admiration, of his entire community of views and—in cauda venenum—solicited a little place as editor at Le Pays réel.

One will agree that it would have been fairly difficult for me to plant at the bottom of an article in our daily a name like his.

Lévy waited, was patient. Then, seeing that his approaches did not succeed, he passed heroically, like a vulgar Tschoffen, to the house across the street, went to serve Pierlot and Spaak a little speech identical to the one that had not convinced me. He had the good taste not to speak of his National Socialist letter of autumn 1940. He was installed in a solid London cheese of propaganda, journalism, and radio. He returned to Brussels papered with multicolored decorations, dazzling like a cockatoo’s backside.

I have not found, in all the Belgian press of 1945-1946, articles more hateful, more filthy than those devoted to me by this rejected solicitor.

Belgian journalists under the occupation? There are those who wanted and who could. There are those who wanted, and who could not.

It is these latter who, in 1945, had the others shot.

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XIV

THE COLLABORATIONIST CROWD

The “occupied” of May 1940. - The escapade of the two million Belgian fugitives. - General Francophobia, Anglophobia, Germanophilia. - The Germans and the French after the “events.” - Franco-German honeymoon. - Three quarters of the Belgians collaborationist. - Prince de Croÿ’s project. - Public reproaches concerning my wait-and-see attitude. - Zeal of the prisoner officers. - The return from France of army matériel. - General madness.

One should not imagine, after the fact, that in the summer and autumn of 1940 Belgium saw only the elites, whether of the right or the left, rush headlong toward collaboration.

Electorally and demagogically, the argument might be of some interest. But the elites had wings on their backs only because the whole country had wings on its back. Belgium, in its entirety, was collaborationist. And Belgium was not alone in this. Paris, like Brussels, swooned before the “occupiers.”

Eighteen days had been enough for Belgian territory to be entirely submerged. Poland had been knocked out in two weeks. Norway, despite its thousands of fjords, its thick April snow, its size, and the triple Allied landing, had been occupied in four weeks. Denmark had resisted a little less than a quarter of an hour. Holland four days. One week after the Battle of the Somme, the French army had been annihilated. Belgium had saved face.

The population had been panic-stricken during the first days. Two million cowards had rushed pell-mell, in whirlwinds of dust, toward French territory: enormous matrons in furs, half dead from suffocation under the crushing May sun; hearses, fire engines, refrigerator trucks, carting about haggard beings. Old people collapsed from fatigue and fear; their corpses, abandoned anywhere by their own children, blackened in the open air, covered with flies. The spectacle did little honor to humanity. Women had even been seen hitching up their skirts to the abdomen before hundreds of people, promising themselves to the male who would load them into his car or onto his truck.

The German wave had passed. The population that had stayed in place, treated courteously by the troops of the Reich, soon recovered its composure. Having been unable to flee for lack of material means, it immediately awarded itself certificates of intrepidity.

Hundreds of thousands of shops and private houses were empty. Belgians and Frenchmen, honest people in the ordinary course of their lives, were seen converting themselves from the Meuse to the Rhône into a fierce pack of looters. The assailants smashed in shop windows and ran off carrying mountains of tins, bolts of fabric, even display mannequins and stocks of automatic scales. In private houses, shutters were forced, people burst in, tore away bed sheets, curtains, clocks, shower installations, telephone sets. For months the police-court reports were to be fed by these edifying exploits.

The Germans of June 1940 bothered no one. They confined themselves to giving magnificent concerts. Euphoria was general.

As much as the victorious Germans were then admired in Belgium, the Allies were vomited up and detested: the French, because after giving the spectacle of scarcely edifying drunkenness and then of desperate flight, they had insulted King Leopold and the Belgian army; the English, because they had carried out senseless destruction during their retreat. Every Belgian whose windowpanes had been

broken by the dynamite of the Tommies, every subscriber whose telephone had been put out of action after the last-minute explosion of the Brussels central exchange, swore and cursed against the United Kingdom.

The Belgian is like that. Great patriotic feelings rarely choke him. He makes revolutions over questions of grain-staging posts (the Bruges Matins), communal taxes (the Dukes of Burgundy), sacristans' candles (Joseph II), the salt tax (William I of the Netherlands). He supported collaboration so long as it allowed him to fill his belly and his pockets. He dropped Hitler in 1941 over stories of marmalade coupons and socks, returned to the English when they, having finally understood, began speaking of ships already quite ready to be unloaded at Zeebrugge and Antwerp, filled to the brim with white flour, pork products, chocolate, and coffee from the Antilles.

During their flight, the Anglo-Saxons had destroyed at random bridges, viaducts, telephones, had shot in five seconds completely innocent "suspects"; certain exploits, quickly known throughout the country, had earned the islanders an unfortunate reputation, notably the orgy during which they had invaded a convent between Tournai and Ath, had put on, laughing uproariously, the clothes of the nuns, exposing the latter, moaning and completely naked, at the edge of the lawns of the monastic garden, accustomed to other spectacles.

The Belgians, during the summer of 1940, had the English in their noses. There was not a single exception, in any corner of the territory. French and English were abhorred. This feeling was general.

One might have thought that the return of the fugitives from the Midi would reverse the situation. The Belgians of the interior, swelling their chests (they had not been afraid!), awaited with suspicion the Belgians from outside, those who, with fire somewhere other than in their pipe, had stopped only at the last café on the Canebière or at the springs of the Tourmalet. They were watched for, these globetrotters of panic!

They returned more Francophobic and more Anglophobic than anyone. Their passage through France, from May to August, had left them unforgettable memories. They had had to endure the scenes of furious madness of 28 May 1940. Many, even before that date, had been treated as "Boches from the North" and invited, when they begged for a glass of water at ten francs, to go quench their thirst in the Albert Canal. But 28 May had been the bouquet. All of them, that day, had been jostled, manhandled, cuffed, roughed up, apostrophized with that incisive, scourging eloquence which the last Paris street urchin handles with consummate dexterity. They had had to swallow the toad, humble themselves, go in procession to war memorials to lay flowers of "reparation" and "expiation"! They made themselves small as field mice and joined the French chorus rather cowardly, copiously despising their army and their King, in order to avoid ending up in a concentration camp or being thrown headfirst into the mud.

They should have kicked back violently when slapped in the face, should have let themselves be cut to pieces rather than tolerate such insults. In general, they were not very fiery, were realists first of all, swallowing sideways, but swallowing all the same, the jeers and humiliations.

But the dish of 28 May had stayed on their stomachs. The more cowardly they had been, the more furious they were at what they had undergone, and above all at having undergone it.

The opposition of temperaments and sensibilities had revealed itself on that occasion with great sharpness.

For most Belgian refugees, France before the war had been only a distant mirage, adorned with the most poetic and seductive charms. The 1940 debacle, in one week, laid bare all souls, Belgian and French. Men revealed themselves as they are: selfish, fiercely eager to save their own property, ready to trample friends, old people, children, in order to flee faster, to obtain the last loaf of bread, the last available room. It was not a well-chosen occasion for people-to-people fraternizations.

And then the Belgian does not understand French irony, alert, dazzling, stinging like a dart, but generally without malice. Serious as Buddhas, easily solemn, touchy, believing themselves outraged under the gust of biting shafts, grumbling and growling instead of replying or at least smiling, our two million compatriots raged in that atmosphere, sometimes as ridiculous as oxen driven mad by ten flies. Everything seemed wrong to them. They, accustomed to washing and "re-clothing" their house from morning to night, to cleaning with buckets of water, every Friday, even the street itself as if it were their corridor, exchanged in low voices horrified remarks when they saw the filth of French inns, their little damp and dark staircases, the foul lavatories, badly closed, without running water, opening onto the pantry or the kitchen. At night, fleas frolicked over the good fat women of Brussels, with abundant and unctuous flesh as in the paintings of Jordaens and Rubens. In the morning, husbands, called to shout their indignation, had to contemplate, on ruddy landscapes, the tangle of protuberances, big as strawberries, that the fleas had left behind as they fled. These agile little beasts did more than a hundred thousand Hitlerian propagandists to destroy the French mirage in the mind—if one may say so—of our brave Belgians. Before attracting them again as tourists to Toulouse and Perpignan, it will be necessary to cover Wallonia and Flanders with very clear posters bearing these simple words: "Tourist Association of the South of France. Notice: The fleas of 1940 are dead." Otherwise, the Belgians will visit the North Pole, the South Pole, the Cordillera of the Andes, the Dead Sea, the Himalayas, but they will not be seen again on the battlefields where, in 1940, French fleas triumphed over the soft backsides of their mothers-in-law, their wives, and their maidens!

The abominations of 28 May 1940, the filth, the bedbugs, human selfishness, the rather stingy side of French economy contrasting with the Belgian's exuberance, quick to spend, to amuse himself, to drink well, to eat well; the sharp wit of the talkative Frenchman, mocking and teasing, clashing with the broad, rough-and-ready joy of the man from the North, rebellious to arrow-like irony; the general atmosphere of excitement, suspicion, quarrels, sniping, chauvinism; deprivation of their comforts, absence from home, uncertainty—everything combined to make the two million Belgian refugees two million dissatisfied people, deeply disappointed, furious at being cooped up, desiring only one thing: to return home, find again their street, their armchairs, their slippers, their radio, their fried potatoes, their crustless bread, their half-pints, and their accent!

On this jostled conservatism and on this nostalgia, the very real charm of the French provinces no longer had any hold: fresh strawberry trees, burning blackberry bushes, long weathered silkworm houses, white bastides, black pines and cypresses, azure calanques, peaceful herds, the perfume of aioli and brandades, fragrant cantaloupes, clairette, blanquette flashing with sunlight...

Only fear of the Germans still held back our moaners. Between fleas and the Wehrmacht, they chose fleas for a few more weeks, until the day when news from the country began to filter through: those who had risked returning sang marvels. "They" were kind, polite, arrested no one, did not rape old ladies, did not roast children on spits.

The attack by the English fleet at Mers-el-Kébir, crushing more than fifteen hundred Frenchmen in the Algerian roadstead, had finished turning opinion against the English, on both sides of the demarcation line. Since the Germans were like this, they would set off again!

The Germans had organized the repatriations remarkably. Not from political calculation, but because it is in their temperament to organize everything carefully. Stuffed into vans or piled into their long ultramodern limousines, which had so astonished the French—accustomed, for their part, to refitting every spring, with bits of wire, their old high-legged Fords of the 1921 or 1922 models—the Belgians arrived en masse at the German posts at Moulins and elsewhere.

They looked at the “occupiers” with a certain emotion. “Fine-looking fellows!” the women decreed, after a first knowledgeable glance.

German nurses, all blonde and smiling, came forward with jugs of milk, offering cups and buttered bread to the children. “And it seems, godferdum, there is soup too!” announced the head of the tribe, important, on returning from a rapid inspection.

A Belgian never refuses a bowl of soup. The family approached the long tables and lapped up the bowls.

“And how much do we owe you, Mademoiselle?” A smile explained that it was free. “You realize, eh, Crotteke? Free! You remember the water from the Albert Canal?”

The family settled back in, more bulky, more appeased too. A fat cigar was lit, puffed religiously. The road was animated. Jokes were shouted from car to car. But the petrol was running out. They stopped at a garage.

“Ah! There you are, Belgians!” cried the French mechanic. “The pump? At the Fritz’s! Over there, after the bistro!”

Ten cars, twenty cars with red numbers were stopped in front of the German relay: “Do you think they’re going to sell us petrol like that?” They did not sell it. They gave it! Twenty liters. Thirty liters. Fifty liters. Everything needed to return to the country.

Then came total relief: petrol for the road, milk, slices of bread, soup, and, at night, reception centers staggered along the whole route, always lit by the smile of the little Gretchens, clean, polite, skillful, tender with children. The most fearful and the most hateful felt themselves conquered.

“We would never have thought they were like that.” “If we had known, we would not have left!”

This human welcome, following the anguish of exile, these relays, these lodgings, these attentions, deeply moved the two million Belgians returning to their homes. Passing from one extreme to the other, wholly in the joy of finding their houses again, they arrived with mouths flowering with praise: “Grandmother, if only you had seen them!”

Grandmother had seen. Everyone had seen. Everyone was anti-English, anti-French; everyone was Germanophile.

In crossing occupied France rapidly, the Belgians could not fail to be struck by the serenity that prevailed and by the perfect understanding visibly existing between the public and the occupiers.

With marvelous discretion, the French veiled the words that would have evoked too precisely the most

tremendous thrashing a people had ever received in its history. The headlong flight of ten million and more human beings, in the anarchy of June, had become, biblically, “the exodus.” Parisian women said the word to you with lowered eyes, delightfully. As for the military defeat, it was modestly called “the events.”

What finds, those two expressions! In the depths of its wounded pride, a people that always had the gift of happy expressions knew how to find words capable of softening its bitterness.

Already conquered by the sweetness of French life, by the exquisiteness, the light and spruce grace of the women, by the limpidity of the light, the equilibrium of the stones, songs of harmony and nobility, the Germans wanted nothing but to be received kindly and to be loved. French haughtiness, sometimes so irritating, had not yet reappeared. The noise of the panzers rolling over the pavement of the King still deafened the ears.

What the Frenchman sometimes lacks in order to be irresistible is modesty. In August and September 1940, the women had soft voices in half-tones. The shopkeepers, returned from the Midi, sheepish, pockets empty, were without swagger. Soldiers and politicians kept silent. No irritating and vain cock-a-doodle-doos in a country where genius can have meaning only in measure, correctness, and balance.

For the first time perhaps in the history of France, the French had been conquered by foreigners and admired them. That made them more human, masked their little faults, and allowed one to discover, in a naturalness that returned at a gallop, their incomparable qualities, in the first rank of which was simplicity. The perfect is simple. The French language, French art, French philosophy have the stripped clarity, the transparency of spring water.

But the desire to impress often falsifies the French genius. In 1940, freed of the gaudy feathers of pride, France was noble, attractive—not because she was humiliated, but because she was stripped bare. I could not think of her without thinking of the mutilated Victory of Samothrace, the purest and most triumphant of silent songs.

This treasure of French harmonies, with inflections marked by duration, and the great original life overflowing from the Germanic plains, might have created, fused together, the definitive strength of Europe: the united strength of blood and grace, comprising the order of the State and the order of the spirit. In the autumn of 1940, the climate existed.

Everywhere else, collaboration was born of barter, theft, or political contract. In France, it sprang up, in this half-silence of hearts, from a very high quality, spirituality, and sensibility. It sank there as elsewhere. But for a few weeks the two geniuses in which the soul of Europe lives had been face to face, had looked at one another without pride, and had received, from moved gods, the sacred tremor of fortunate interferences...

Our good Belgians, for their part, without giving themselves over to such lofty speculations but deploying their prodigious sense of material adaptation, had reinstalled themselves in their factories and at their counters, tempting the occupiers as best they could, in order to obtain ever more from them.

Each family had “its” German, generally of no importance whatever, but whom it had made its lightning rod and petitioning agent, for whom from time to time it cooked up a carefully prepared little feast that the feldgrau guest washed down with champagne cut with Burgundy, without prejudice to two or three well-filled half-pints. The Belgian was scandalized to see his Clos-de-Vougeot and his

Corton thus profaned, but the resumption of business was well worth a gastronomic heresy!

Not the slightest incident disturbed the euphoria. One never heard of a telephone wire cut, of an awkward word let slip in a restaurant. It was the honeymoon in all its splendor. The Germans had won. They were well regarded. The Belgian, realist before all else, was impressed by their success. He could have contented himself with saying with André Gide (Private Journal, 5 September 1940): “To come to terms with yesterday’s enemy is not cowardice; it is wisdom, and it is to accept the inevitable.” But he went further: he admired. He admired everything, like a child: the solidity of the uniforms, the power of the panzers, the order of the motorized columns, the speed with which the machinery of the State, the railways, the bridges, economic life had been put back into service. “No question, they’re aces!” concluded the ruddy bourgeois on the terrace of the Albert Ier or L’Horloge, paying for his round of Export.

The Germanophilia of the public was further reinforced by the general contempt in which everyone, without exception, held the democratic regime that had just collapsed in defeat, mess, fear, and shame.

Brussels had been covered, well before my return, with bilingual slips: Degrelle was right. Not one of these papers was torn down.

Of course I had been right! No one would have thought of disagreeing on that. I could ride in a tram, drink a Stella at the Porte de Namur or the Place de la Bourse, walk along the Rue Neuve or the Boulevard Adolphe-Max: I met only smiles. People nudged one another: “Did you see Degrelle?” or, more Brussels-style, “Did you see Léon?” but with a curiosity always sympathetic.

Postwar commentators have unanimously recognized that in the autumn of 1940 three quarters of the Belgians were collaborationist and convinced of the necessity of a radical reform of institutions. One ought to say ninety-nine percent. Nothing betrayed any opposition whatever. On Avenue Louise as well as in the depths of the suburbs, in the discreet little facilities where heroes in potential could, without danger, transcribe their contained feelings in vengeful terms, the graffiti all ran in a single direction: “Pierlot to the stake!” “Death to the Limoges men!” “Long live the King!” Sometimes one even saw swastikas, awkwardly traced in green by schoolboys’ fingernails.

The political rallying took on the character of a cavalcade. Men violently anti-German until 10 May, for example those of the National Legion of the lugubrious Hoornaert, ran from group to group to negotiate agreements. The Dinaso movement of Joris van Severen, martyr of Abbeville, stirred with equal ardor. As if all these parties won over to a policy of the New Order had not been enough, people tried to create still others, better adapted to the revolution that had just taken place!

Prince de Croÿ went excursioning through all the Dienststellen, accompanied by a secretary, solemn and important as a coadjutor bishop. He wanted, for his part, to launch a great collaborationist party formed by the prisoners of May. Since there were more than half a million of them, there was a famous fish to catch for an artist of the hook. Croÿ and his coadjutor came to my house to set out their project, which had moreover already been submitted to the Germans. All Belgians were like that in 1940: they addressed themselves to the Germans first!

The Prince’s plan was a little childish: it consisted in sending to the five or six hundred thousand prisoners or former prisoners a printed appeal accompanied by a membership form for his new party. He expected at once to receive two hundred thousand replies.

I warned him. In politics, it takes more than a printed circular to win a member. But the fact that Prince de Croÿ expected to make his catch by means of this single bait is one more piece of testimony to add to the collaboration file. Croÿ did not imagine that there could be, in the country, any opposition whatever to his project. Two Belgians out of three automatically throw the circulars they receive into the wastebasket or coal bin. The others, after reading, would be swept away: two hundred thousand, the Prince calculated—that is, all those who would cast an eye over his sheet. He had drawn up his budget, fixed a ceiling of one hundred and fifty thousand francs: the price of five hundred thousand printed sheets and five hundred thousand postage stamps.

Croÿ was not a madman. He was a well-ordered big fellow, a reserve officer, bearer of a glorious name, healthy, balanced, radiant with vigor, burning with the desire to serve his fatherland. His project presented itself as it did because the Belgians of 1940 were what they were: all disgusted by the stagnant waters of the old regime, all won over by the Germans, all convinced of the need to give Belgium new institutions with authoritarian tendencies, all certain, finally, that Germany had taken command of Europe forever ("for a thousand years," Spaak would one day say) and that the cleverest would be those who adapted the fastest.

The only reproaches I received at that time were caused by my prudence, judged unreasonable, and by my "wait-and-see attitude." I wanted to see. Before committing myself politically, I intended to know King Leopold's opinion. Because of these delays, I was overwhelmed with recriminations, even blame. In my fabulous mail, such as no politician ever received in Belgium, many correspondents said to me: "What are you waiting for? Why don't you act? When are you taking power?"

It was not as simple as that. I did not want to owe my influence to authorizations granted with condescension by German subordinates. Leader of a party whose ideas had just triumphed, I intended to deal man to man with the head of the Reich, without passing through the Falkenhausens and other subordinate agents. Moreover, adhering to Rex's national, royalist, and constitutional program, I was firmly determined not to transform myself into a factional rebel. It would have been easy. For a hundred little political kinglets, it was a temptation. But I would act, Rex would act, only when the King, the last representative of legality, had sent me his licet or at least his nihil obstat.

In the meantime, I would continue walking my little girls in the Forest of Soignes, at Rouge-Cloître, Groenendael, and Enfants-Noyés, speaking to them of saints, ogres, fairies, wolves, teaching them the names of trees and birds, watching for the bounding fawn, the fluting blackbird, a hundred times happier feeling in my fist a frail, soft, warm little hand than thinking of a ministerial super-portfolio.

But when the petitioners, massed processionally at the entrance to my property, saw me emerge from the wood, a wildflower between my teeth, framed by my bouncing troop of little gazelles, they all looked at me, all looked at my children. The bankers did not find that serious. The militants said to themselves, shaking their heads: "But what the hell is our Chief doing?"

The soldiers themselves, vanquished the day before, and who more than any others should have shown a minimum of restraint, displayed an eagerness still more effervescent than that of the civilians.

Their zeal not to diminish in any way their chances in the new regime was so bewildering that it sometimes reached the heights of the comic. Not one prisoner officer in a hundred would have tried to keep out of it. To keep out of it was to "lose one's rights." To remain a prisoner was to keep one's rights!

After the capitulation, the Germans had allowed Belgian officers to run about the country, return home by automobile, take a bath, put their household in order. The main concentration was at Antwerp. But even there, everyone could have slipped away: the officers were lodged, in complete freedom, in abandoned villas nearby. When the trains left for the camps of the Reich, there was a jostling scramble not to miss them! Two officers who arrived too late at Antwerp station hired a taxi, made a fantastic race that cost them several hundred francs, in order finally, with a “whew!” of relief, to rejoin the famous transport that would land them beyond the Rhine! Thus the possibilities of advancement in the National Socialist army of tomorrow would be saved!

As for the rare officers who had taken refuge in London, they were unanimously regarded by their comrades as hotheads and the last of imbeciles.

One sometimes wonders whether one is not dreaming when one remembers everything that happened then.

The prisoners were prisoners. Granted. It was understandable that they did not try to escape. But those who had escaped surrender? Those who were in the unoccupied French zone, on the Côte d’Azur, from which every day smuggling boats carried off Gaullists? Or near the Pyrenees, that is, neutral Spain, relay toward the Allied training camps? Those were the most enraged in wanting to place themselves under the control of the German army.

An old dotard, General Denis, Minister of National Defense, set the Belgian army that had taken refuge in free France on the road toward the territories occupied by the Reich, “the war being finished,” he proclaimed! The soldiers most prompt to dash in their limousines toward Brussels were the high dignitaries of the Military Auditorate, Ganshof van der Meersch at their head! Whole trains of career officers and noncommissioned officers were shipped toward the occupied French zone, without even having obtained real guarantees of demobilization: these trains branched off, sped toward Germany! Denis himself had sent toward the Oflags and Stalags the remaining cadres of the Belgian army!

Absolutely unheard-of things happened. I still remember a morning when a prodigious uproar shook the Chaussée de Waterloo. I ran to see, like everyone. At first I thought the Belgian army had taken its revenge, driven out the Germans, and was returning victorious to Brussels. Magnificent motorized columns, endless files of dazzling trucks, driven by Belgian soldiers in uniform, were making in Uccle a “Joyous Entry” as noisy as it was sensational. The khaki army itself was bringing back to the Germans marvelous matériel that had escaped the two capitulations, that was in the unoccupied part of France, that could without difficulty have been hidden away, destroyed, or converted into civilian equipment. By order of the Belgian Minister of War and of Prime Minister Pierlot, it was being delivered triumphantly to the Wehrmacht, while the latter was still fighting full force against the British Empire!

The Germans, delighted, had the Belgian army trucks lined up, file by file, in their equipment parks. Everyone found this normal. The soldiers laughed. The crowd laughed.

This was no longer collaboration. It was not even prostration. It was furious madness.

XV

LEOPOLD III COLLABORATIONIST

Pierre Daye and collaboration. - The King sends Count Capelle to me. - The interview of 21 August 1940. - Leopold III and my arrest. - The King and the newspapers. - The King and the V.N.V. - The King and State reform. - The King and contacts with the Reich. - Otto Abetz and Leopold III. - Instructions to Robert Poulet. - Nearly general rallying of the Palace to collaboration. - The King's aide-de-camp as collaborator of the censored press.

On 21 August 1940, Count Capelle, secretary of Leopold III, informed Pierre Daye that he had received from the Sovereign the order to make important communications to me. He asked Pierre Daye, former head of the Rex parliamentary group in the Chamber of Deputies, to prepare this interview.

It took place that same afternoon, at three o'clock, at Pierre Daye's home, 1 Avenue de Tervueren, in Brussels.

It is important to note that this was in no way a private initiative of Count Capelle. The King could perfectly well have contented himself with having me told—as he did in most cases—that he was a prisoner and could not take any political initiative. Instead of that, the Sovereign charged Count Capelle with seeing me.

Pierre Daye had taken refuge in the south of France during the invasion. On 28 May he had been confined by the Bordeaux Sûreté to the Île de Ré. He lived there peacefully for a few weeks, with Henri Béraud, under the fragrant pines, required simply to present himself each morning at the police station of a pretty little green and blue port. From the terrace of a flowered eating house, he helped a great French journalist write, for one of the most important Paris dailies, dazzling reports on the land and naval battles of the northern front. The account of the battle of the Dunkirk fleet, notably, was sublime. Distance, in such cases, allows things to be done well!

When the Germans landed at Saint-Martin-de-Ré, Pierre Daye obtained authorization to return to Brussels in his car. He was at once in the front row of the collaborationist spectacle.

At that moment I was still believed to be solidly dead and buried. That led the big sharks of the old regime to engage in numerous approaches toward Pierre Daye. The most eager was, of course, Minister of State Lippens. An important discussion took place between them, on 17 July, in an office of the Bank of the Belgian Congo. The famous "general" Hannecart, magnate of the Bank of Brussels and of the cement trusts, was no less ardent, shortly afterward, in inviting Pierre Daye to his table.

But above all Pierre Daye had regular contact with the Court. Before the war he had been, for me, a very skillful liaison agent on that side.

In July 1940, considered persona gratissima, he was informed very exactly of the King's state of mind regarding collaboration, as well as regarding me. When Pierre Daye managed to get me out of trouble at Carcassonne, after my release from the Vernet camp, he was able, on the way back, to enlighten me amply. I learned with what vivid terms the King had deplored—a little late!—my arrest of 10 May, to what point the King and his entourage were set against the Limoges government and desired, in the line and ideas of Rex, a profound reform of the institutions and political morals of our country.

Moreover, the Palace advocated, discreetly but clearly, a policy of collaboration with the occupier. Henri de Man, officer attached to the King and his secret agent with dictatorial governments abroad, had issued a vibrant pro-Hitler proclamation without being disavowed by Leopold III.

I could have contented myself with these indications. But I did not want to be rolled as I had been on 10 May 1940, sent that day to meet death, although I had followed strictly the King's policy—or more exactly one of the King's policies, for I did not yet know at that moment that he had spare ones—according to the opinions he himself had given me, man to man, on several occasions during the thankless months of neutrality. In August 1940 I asked for clear directives, an agreement stated otherwise than in a mystery favorable to later repudiations.

At the beginning of my conversation with Count Capelle, I could not refrain from reminding him in sharp terms of the abandonment in which the King had left me on 10 May 1940, at the hour when the Jansons and the Ganshof van der Meersches were doing their dirty work. "The King," Count Capelle replied to me, "insisted that I repeat to you that your arrest was made without his knowledge and that he felt the keenest regret over it. A communication in this sense was already made on his order to your family a few weeks ago."

I wanted to believe in the sincerity of the explanation. Since then, I have often wondered whether the King was really fooled by Janson on 10 May 1940, or whether, rather, we were not simply dropped that day by His Majesty, as before that date and after that date most of those were dropped who, unconscious pawns in the double game, had been placed by the astute Sovereign on the wrong pan of the scales.

Now that one sees a little clearly, there would be a fascinating book to write on the about-faces of Leopold III, perfectly explicable, in my view, from the standpoint of dynastic interest, although they are not lacking in surprising Machiavellianism. But in 1940 this propensity of the King to let his losing partners fall, abandoning them to their fate, had not yet been detected.

I also thought that the past was the past. In the autumn of 1940, the day after defeat, what mattered was the present, and above all the future. What had to be done? What would the King answer to the questions that haunted us?

I reported to Count Capelle, one by one, my concerns. Here, transcribed minutely, is the substance of my dialogue with the secretary of Leopold III: QUESTION: Must one wait, publish nothing, not move? Or can one resume political action, that is, inevitably, collaborate? ANSWER: One can resume action and, as they say, collaborate. QUESTION: To cite a precise case, does the King think that the newspapers should be republished, despite censorship? ANSWER: Not only are these reappearances useful, they are desired. QUESTION: Is that really, clearly, the King's opinion? ANSWER: It is the King's opinion.

QUESTION: Thus, then, I may be sure that the reappearance of Le Pays réel will be approved? ANSWER: It will be approved.

QUESTION: But Rex is not alone on the field in Belgium. The V.N.V. is very active. I see that Minister de Man, the King's intimate collaborator, is in contact with the Flemish nationalist leaders, that Minister Lippens, much appreciated at the Palace, has also gotten in touch with them. For me, in a certain way, that is an indication. Nevertheless I would like to learn something more precise.

The V.N.V., the Palace knows as well as I do, has taken extremely sharp positions. It treats one half of the country's population with great harshness. The King advises abstaining from contacts with the Flemish nationalist leaders, or does he consider it preferable that bases of agreement be sought with them?

Rex is completely free. Its former “gentlemen’s agreement” of 1936 with the V.N.V. is virtually void. Up to now no negotiation has been begun. What should be done? Oppose? Abstain? Act as a team? ANSWER: The Flemish nationalist movement is originally healthy. Its present reactions, its exaggerations, answer the errors committed by the former leaders of the State over dozens of years. But the principal leaders of the V.N.V. are considered by the King to be decent people. Their movement is today one of the most important elements in view of the material and moral recovery of the country. To oppose them, to make them irreducible, would be to break the last possibilities of union and renovation of the country. QUESTION: Then it is useful to go forward? ANSWER: The King thinks the worst danger would be to leave the Flemish nationalist leaders isolated. That would be to renounce. It would be to recognize before the occupier that apart from them there no longer exists any political force in Belgium.

It would certainly be desirable for Rex to renew with the V.N.V. relations as good as before, even if the external atmosphere has changed. The King always insists on this: the Flemish people today constitute a magnificent force. The V.N.V., at present, forms its pivot; therefore break nothing. Try everything to come to an arrangement. QUESTION: Good. But the Palace personalities or friends of the Palace, Mr. de Man and Mr. Lippens notably, who have thrown bridges these days toward the V.N.V., have they known, in this respect, the King’s point of view as you are making it known to me? ANSWER: They have been oriented in exactly the same direction as you!

QUESTION: Now, if you permit me, we shall approach another problem. It is very possible that I will be called, one day or another, by Hitler. Now, there still exists more or less a Belgian government. I know very well that in fact its influence at this hour has fallen to zero and that the King no longer wants to have anything to do with it. But may I, if the occasion arises, I, party leader and deputy, partially substitute myself for this moribund Pierlot government by eventually conducting negotiations with foreign statesmen, as indeed the Pierlot government itself invites me to do? ANSWER: There is no longer a Pierlot government. QUESTION: Ah! And that is certain? ANSWER: Yes, certain. QUESTION: That is quite fresh news for me. The government no longer exercised authority. It had made that known. But up to now I had not heard it said that it had withdrawn. ANSWER: Nevertheless it has withdrawn. QUESTION: You are good enough to tell me so, and I thank you. But is it hearsay, or has the Pierlot government made known to the King that it ceased to exist? ANSWER: Yes, it has made it known to the King. QUESTION: Recently? ANSWER: Very recently. QUESTION: Did this communication have a definitive character? ANSWER: Yes, definitive.

[Note in the French text:] The King in reality went still further. He wished to have regular contacts with several Flemish nationalist leaders. On his direct order, Count Capelle had, during the four years of occupation, a series of interviews with Dr. Elias (condemned to death in 1946) and with Gérard Romsée (condemned, in 1948, to twenty years’ hard labor). Both of them patriotic and Flemish as lucid as they were proud, thus received precious directives from the Sovereign and abundant encouragement. “We strongly urge you to undertake the envisaged negotiations.” (Letter from Janson.)

(Here came details, four answers to four questions, which Count Capelle asked me kindly to keep for myself alone. I therefore omit them, though with regret, from my account.) QUESTION: Did this notice of cessation of functions cause surprise at the Palace? ANSWER: Not at all, as you may imagine! On numerous occasions already, Mr. Pierlot and his colleagues had offered to the King to go away. The Palace was besieged with offers of resignation at the same time as with requests for audience presented by emissaries of Mr. Pierlot and Mr. Spaak. QUESTION: Of these various petitions and approaches, are there tangible proofs left? I possess a precise letter, that of Janson. You, at the Palace,

do you have absolutely formal documents? ANSWER: Yes. QUESTION: I mean written proofs. Will not certain people later wrap everything in fog and confusion? ANSWER: Numerous documents exist, written documents. I do not believe myself authorized to tell you more. But be reassured. In truth, the last communication made was, fundamentally, only a simple final formality, a conclusion. QUESTION: To avoid misunderstandings, I shall summarize the situation: in fact, Belgium no longer has a government; only the King still represents the country; the King, still being prisoner, does not for the moment have the right to engage in official manifestations and receive political personalities; he therefore reaches them through intermediaries belonging to his immediate entourage; you are one of these intermediaries. Are we agreed? ANSWER: You employ, as always, very direct language, which is not in the habits of the Palace. But your summary corresponds to reality. There is no longer a government. The King is prisoner. I am obviously seeing you on his order. QUESTION: We shall now, if you see no objection, gather together the royal directives that you have set out to me. First: usefulness of resuming public action, notably through the press. Second: usefulness of coming to an understanding with the Flemish nationalist leaders.

Now let us go further. The Pierlot government having ceased to exist, it will be useful to prepare something new in politics. This “new,” the Sovereign must well imagine, is conceivable for us, Rexists, only in a strengthening of the authority of the Executive Power, in federalism within a strong State, and in a social policy of great scope. Such bases of action are the only ones that interest us. Can we write, speak, struggle, convince the crowds in that sense while being certain we are not in disagreement with the political and social conceptions of the Palace? I do not ask that my campaigns be approved. But let me be told frankly whether I am not on the wrong road. ANSWER: These positions are sound and are admitted today without effort by the great majority of Belgians. QUESTION: One last point, to which I already alluded just now. It is perhaps the most important to clarify. Up to now, political and diplomatic collaboration with the Reich is only a formula. But on the day when it will be necessary to pass to action, to take initiatives, various tactics will be possible. First, a question of principle that I repeat: may one meet German personalities? Is it admitted? Is it useful? Is it desired? ANSWER: In the state in which we find ourselves, isolation would be fatal. One must discuss; that is clear. The King’s fiercest opponents on 28 May 1940, Messrs. Pierlot and Spaak, themselves today advise negotiation. QUESTION: Good. I want the King to know everything. Up to now I have followed a line of conduct that may seem strange: I have established absolutely no relations with the occupation authorities in Belgium. I know neither what they want nor what they are preparing. I have abstained from any visit and any sounding, first because I wanted beforehand to know the authorized opinion of the King, on which you have just enlightened me; then because it would, in my view, condescend to a serious loss of prestige to accept discussions on an equal footing with mere executing agents of the Reich in Brussels. I am the leader of Rex. General von Falkenhausen is only a general like any other, an official who acts only at second hand, who may always be moved, replaced, disavowed. Such negotiations therefore do not interest me, because I would be the only one to commit myself. I want to go to the very top or go nowhere.

I ask for your opinion, as secretary of the King here and political delegate of the King: my concern, seen from the Palace angle, is it in conformity with the dignity and interest of the country? ANSWER: Such a tactic would obviously be the ideal tactic. But the whole question is to know whether direct contact with Hitler is possible. QUESTION: I have reasons to believe it is possible. What is thought at the Palace of Mr. Abetz?

(At that moment of the conversation, Count Capelle gave a start. I saw clearly that I had just ventured onto delicate ground. A few weeks later, I would understand why Abetz’s name had produced this almost electric reaction in the King’s secretary. I cut it short.) QUESTION: Excuse me. I am not trying

to wrest secrets from you. Let us say, then, that I asked nothing. I simply want to warn you that I have twice seen, in Paris, Ambassador Abetz. The first time on returning from prison: a dinner invitation, a simple political contact. The second time during a trip to Paris. That time Mr. Abetz made to me an unofficial but direct communication: Mr. von Ribbentrop desires to see me. From the gravity with which Ambassador Abetz informed me of this project, I believed I understood that Mr. von Ribbentrop was not alone involved.

I may soon be the object of a new communication from Mr. Abetz. It could assume a character of capital importance. What should be done in that case? Can you orient me? ANSWER: What you reveal to me is very serious. I would not want to commit the King concerning a project that His Majesty has not yet had occasion to know and study.

But I am certain I can tell you that in principle contacts of this kind, prepared in a highly patriotic spirit, are in no way to be discouraged.

(I did not want to content myself with this blessing given from afar. I concluded:)

We still have time before us, no doubt. Put the King very exactly up to date on the Abetz affair. In the event that His Majesty should view with displeasure this action being undertaken, even simply being prepared, you know perfectly well how you can warn me. Pierre Daye is and will remain our liaison agent. A word of warning coming from the Palace, and I will politically put an end to any conversation with the Reich ambassador, despite the forthright approvals of Pierlot and his team. I will act only if your silence indicates to me that at the Palace no objection is seen to my going further. Even in that case—tell His Majesty this clearly—I will prudently remain at preliminary approaches, the decision in the last resort having to return to the King.

That was, and always was, the basis of my thought. Even in the darkest hours of the war, I always linked the solution of the Belgian case—more exactly of the Western case—to the settlement of the Leopold III case. A resolute partisan of federalism, I supported it as to the stability of a hereditary central power, a link between our two linguistic communities. A popular monarchy, deeply loved by Flemings and Walloons, could more easily have associated the imponderables of psychological order, as important in an enterprise of this scope as the administrative services.

In my plan for gathering together—in whole or in part—the old Burgundian Netherlands, monarchical unity, knot of power and splendor, would have fulfilled the most useful of functions. It became the keystone where the lines of force and beauty of the ancient Leo Belgicus, resurrected by my action, would have met.

My interview with Count Capelle had lasted two hours. Everything had been settled, firmly, without rhetoric. Pierre Daye had been present throughout the conversation. My way of putting my feet in the dish when necessary had delighted him. He, a man accustomed to the catlike caresses of court people, had that day felt a particularly intense pleasure at seeing me, as a man of the woods, clear away so vigorously, with a pruning knife, the thickets that encumbered the royal ground. We spoke again of the Abetz case when Count Capelle had gone out. His lip to the side, sensual and ironic, his round eye shining with malice, friend Pierre said to me: “He knows more than we do, be sure of it. We are not at the end of our surprises.”

He spoke the truth. Otto Abetz had used two tracks. One arrived at my house. Another, of which I had never thought, arrived elsewhere. It was that, no doubt, that Count Capelle had thought I was alluding

to when I suddenly threw out my “What does the Palace think of Mr. Abetz?” No. The secret, the other secret, their secret, had been perfectly kept. It was to be revealed to me abruptly, in Paris, only a few weeks later.

As for the opinion communicated to me by the King’s delegate on the necessity for the press to collaborate, it was to be given, in analogous terms, at the same period, to various personalities as anxious as I to act only according to the Monarch’s recommendations.

When Paul Colin’s Nouveau Journal was launched on 1 October 1940, Robert Poulet, a severely disabled war veteran, writer of probity, of severity of principles, and of patriotism beyond test, agreed to enter the battle only on condition of first receiving precise approval from the Palace of Laeken. Robert Poulet was reassured and encouraged, in the name of the King, by Count Capelle: “You are doing patriotic work,” he told him, after hearing the presentation of the Nouveau Journal’s program.

Throughout the war Robert Poulet (condemned to death in 1946) continued to be encouraged by the Palace. He was received by the King’s secretary about twenty times! “These conversations,” Robert Poulet explained in his Confidential Memorandum intended for the Minister of Justice, “followed one another on average every six weeks, all the time that I remained at the Nouveau Journal. I always registered congratulations. The only reservation once opposed to me concerned my ‘too demagogic’ attitude when I criticized the insufficient social sense of certain Belgian bourgeois. The conversation also concerned important and confidential points. Several days in advance, I was informed by Mr. Capelle of the journey to Berchtesgaden. He asked me not to speak of it provisionally, until agreement had been reached with the Germans on a text. Several times, Mr. Capelle clearly let me understand that the King followed my action with interest and sympathy. Mr. Capelle authorized me to use the expression ‘The King no longer knows them’ in speaking of the ministers in London.”

From his first interview, Robert Poulet too had been informed of the abdication of the Pierlot government. One reads in the account he drew up of this first interview: “Count Capelle formulated various principles: a) The war is finished for Belgium. b) We no longer have allies or obligations toward them. c) We must make our arrangements in view of a probable victory of Germany on the continental plane. d) The Pierlot government is illegitimate (‘We no longer know it’). e) The Congo must keep out of the war. f) The country must be calm and work.

g) The old regime and the institutions that formed its base are obsolete. ‘Something else must be found.’” Questioned by Belgian Justice in 1946 concerning the conversation he had with Robert Poulet, Count Capelle signed a deposition that reproduces almost textually the details he had given me at Pierre Daye’s house a month earlier concerning the withdrawal of Mr. Pierlot and his team. As for the other directives given by Count Capelle to Robert Poulet, the agreement is complete. Here, reproduced textually according to his deposition, are the statements the King’s emissary acknowledged “having been able to make” during his first conversation with the future editor-in-chief of the Nouveau Journal: The war is finished for Belgium. We no longer have allies. There is no doubt as to a possible victory of Germany. The old regime is obsolete. What more was needed? Everything was clear, arch-clear. Of course, as was to be expected, Count Capelle was converted into the Palace’s scapegoat when the King’s affairs turned bad in 1945. Yet he was the last man capable of exaggerating anything whatever in his initiatives or his statements.

Prudent, long formed in reserve, silence, duplicity, knowing better than anyone, since he was in continual contact with Leopold III, what were the difficulties, dangers, and traps of the moment, he would never have risked taking positions without being sure of faithfully repeating the royal thought.

There is more. Not only did Count Capelle come, on order and on behalf of the King, to see me, receive at his home Pierre Daye, Robert Poulet, Elias, Romsée, ten others, but each time he handed the King a written account of these conversations. Is the handing of these accounts to the King denied? Why did they not dare publish them? The one concerning me, notably? Why were they secretly transported abroad in 1945?

What do these hypocritical abandonments mean? The case of my conversation with Count Capelle—from which the collaboration of all my friends flowed—is as clear as can be. It was to the King himself that I had written. It was the King, personally, who had received and read my letter. He alone could have charged Count Capelle with transmitting to me the assurances I had asked of him in such formal fashion.

Let us go to the end. There was not only Count Capelle. Other Palace dignitaries, just as important, were charged with confidential missions of the same kind to a series of political and business personalities. Baron Frédéricq, Viscount Jacques Davignon, not to mention Henri de Man, could give a thousand very useful details on this.

At the Palace of Laeken, rallying to an active policy of collaboration was almost unanimous in 1940. Even in 1941, the Sovereign's intimates were still considered by the Belgian ministers in London as "unfortunate collaborationists." In the "personal and confidential" letter that Mr. Gutt sent from London (37 Eaton Place) to the banker Félicien Cattier, the Minister of Finance described all the King's advisers, except Tilkens and Nolf, as "fatal" advisers who want to make him play either "two boards" or "the wrong one." Yet this letter, Mr. Gutt wrote in 1941.

In 1940, only the collaboration board was being played at the Palace. And if Mr. Tilkens and Mr. Nolf were less "fatal" than the others, they took great care not to show it!

Leopold III's directives were even to be cast in writing in a memorable document that never, during the four years the war lasted, was denied or annulled by the Sovereign.

Count Capelle, mandated for this purpose by Leopold III, had sent on 6 and 12 September 1940, through Count d'Ursel, Belgian minister at Bern, to all Belgian diplomats abroad, a note containing capital instructions. One read there in full: "The occupying authority has a comprehending spirit, which allows hope for an approaching solution.

"Our political independence could be recovered, in part at least; that is the essential thing.

"We have never admitted the thesis of the Pierlot government according to which an alliance exists between Belgium, France, and England. These last two countries were our guarantors, having come at our call, according to their promise; our counterpart was to defend our territory; but there was never a common cause nor a promise to bind our fate.

"When we reached the extreme limit of our territory, we laid down our arms. In fact, the struggle therefore ceased between Belgium and Germany on the morning of 28 May. This is to tell you that we cannot in any way support the ministers who, at present, whether from London or from Lisbon, are pursuing a war that is the opposite of our interest and of loyalty.

"It is particularly reprehensible to risk, as De Vleeschauwer is doing, dragging the Congo into the quarrel. We consider that our colony must observe absolute neutrality, that it must maintain for

commerce the open-door regime, and that its products must be handed over indiscriminately to all who come to take delivery of them. It would be desirable that you and your colleagues reestablish your relations with the diplomatic representatives of Germany. We are no longer, in fact, at war with this country: we must be loyal, correct." These "precious" indications of 6 September 1940 were confirmed almost textually on 12 September.

Of course, once again, in 1945 people wanted to rid themselves of these dead weights by claiming that these very grave documents, sent by a minister as concerned with the interest of the Crown as Count d'Ursel, had been sent without Leopold III's knowledge. Always the same tactic, really not very shining. An ambassador has obeyed with discipline, has minutely executed the orders of the Palace? These orders later prove unfortunate? Immediately the faithful executor of the royal will is summoned to free the King from responsibility. And the Sovereign's lackeys finish off the sacrificed man with blows of the club! The case of General Van den Bergen, the case of Count d'Ursel, the case of how many others...

Such evasions are unworthy of Leopold III's cause. They are not noble. And they are ridiculous. Whom can they deceive? Sooner or later the documents come out. Sooner or later someone speaks. And the public then learns, stupefied, that these notes were the "almost textual" copy of instructions drafted by two intimate collaborators of the King, acting on his order: his secretary, Count Capelle, and his former ambassador in Berlin, Viscount Davignon, assisted by the director of political affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It would be too simple if at every bad swim one could get out of trouble by drowning a devoted servant.

The Ursel circular came so plainly from the Palace of Laeken that the said Palace had it spread not only in the diplomatic corps but also in Belgian circles won over to collaboration. I myself received communication of it through Viscount Davignon, who came in person to inform Pierre Daye of the substance of these royal instructions (that is what they were then called). Henri de Man received communication of it too. And many others.

It was in fact a public document.

Not only had the King, after rereading and approving them, had the Ursel instructions spread; not only did the King have as "officer attached to his person" and intimate adviser a man who had pushed collaborationist enthusiasm so far as to proclaim that the Belgian defeat of May 1940 was a deliverance; not only were we formally encouraged by Leopold III to publish newspapers under the occupation; not only did the King have sent in writing, on several occasions, testimonies of gratitude and interest to the editor-in-chief of Le Soir (of the stolen Le Soir, which was the height of it), but one of the King's most powerful familiars personally collaborated, in the full year 1941, with the censored press, bringing to the weekly of the most disputed writer in the country, Paul Colin, the direct support of his copy!

This familiar of the King was General Van Overstraeten. General Van Overstraeten, a temperament of ascetic and at the same time dictator, fascist in the integral state, was Leopold III's principal military adviser. Now he did not agree to collaborate with Cassandre; he asked to collaborate with Cassandre. More precisely, it was the King's Secretariat that made the request to Robert Poulet and Pierre Daye.

The texts of General Van Overstraeten, before being set in type, had inescapably first to pass under the

control of a military man of the Propaganda Staffel. Truly nothing, whatever the subject of his articles, obliged a general who, in the sight and knowledge of all the Germans, was the King's aide-de-camp and his mentor, to seek this humiliation. The Belgian press would have managed perfectly well without him.

I had no advice to give. The King was master in his palace. Just as he had admitted without flinching that his officer "attached" Henri de Man rejoiced with haste and eloquence over Hitler's victory, so Leopold III could have his reasons for allowing his aide-de-camp to write in a censored newspaper. But this shows to what point, from the snail-seller to the Palace general, all Belgium at the beginning of the occupation was collaborationist.

Let us repeat that the position taken in 1940 by the Palace was perfectly defensible. Nevertheless, in 1945 it would have been better to explain it frankly than to deny it tortuously.

For the Belgians, during the summer of 1940, the fate of the war was decided. Hitler seemed, to the most lucid, master of Belgium's destiny. The Pierlot government was the first to accept this. Therefore one had to be logical, to attempt everything to save what could be saved, to straighten the country up and put it in the best possible situation with a view to its integration into the Europe that was being created.

Our people have marvelous qualities of initiative, tenacity, and skill. They know how to slip in everywhere, succeed everywhere. Accustomed to invasions, they have been able to manage, enrich themselves, radiate, keep their personality under every domination: under the kings of Spain, under Austria, under the sans-culottes, under the Napoleonic Empire. Antwerp had become, in the time of the Habsburgs, the first port of Germandom. In the most tormented days of the Spanish period, we gave the world the masterpieces of Rubens. Under the domination of Vienna and Charles VI, our ships of the Ostend Company had taken flight toward the East Indies. And Grétry had carried to Paris our songs, the songs of grace and hope, in the dark days when French boots trampled us and when thousands of refractory men, pathetic precursors of all "resistances," fell, in the heaths of Limburg and our Ardennes moors, under the bullets of the southern occupiers.

There is in the Belgian people an extraordinary will to live that always raises them back up. They were ready to adapt to Hitler in 1940, as they had adapted to Napoleon a century earlier. They had fought as long as they could, in May 1940. It was finished. There was nothing else to do, after defeat, but to work, with courage and skill, to impose themselves once more.

This reasoning of the people and of King Leopold implied no pessimism. It revealed the good sense of the race, its energy, its profound confidence in life.

Spaak did not think otherwise in 1940, he who wrote: "Germany was believed mistress of Europe for a thousand years."

That admitted, one had to draw the consequences. We shall see how Spaak, Pierlot, and other ministerial birds, drawing more than any of the "occupied" the consequences of the predicted "thousand years" of Germanic hegemony, flew, wing-beat by wing-beat, toward Hitler, collaboration, and the collaborators.

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XVI

PIERLOT AND SPAAK AS COLLABORATIONISTS

The Leopold III conflict. - Pierlot before the invasion. - The King's private cabinet and personal orders. - Incompatibility of characters. - Leopold III's refusal to come to Parliament on May 10, 1940. - Clashes with Pierlot at General Headquarters. - Leopold III's "horrible perspicacity." - Pierlot a partisan of the frantic flight southward. - May 25, 1940 at Wynendaele. - The ultimate sacrifice. - The pathetic night of May 27-28. - Reynaud's incredible aggression. - Leopold III had warned the Allies. - Churchill's not very glorious maneuver. - Pierlot's ignominy on May 28. - The saraband at Limoges. - The debacle at Bordeaux. - Pierlot and Spaak drop the English and run toward Hitler.

In the whirlpool of defeat, the most unexpected group of would-be collaborators, the most stupefying and yet the most determined, in June and July 1940, was unquestionably the Belgian government itself, the same one which, in May, had still shown itself the most fanatical of the diehards.

The Pierlot government, climbing back up, sweating blood and water, from the appalling scandal of May 28, 1940, furiously placed itself in the vanguard of collaboration less than five weeks after its historic exploit against Leopold III.

It is a mad story. But it is a true story, like many mad stories.

When the invasion occurred, it had been a long time since Leopold III and his Prime Minister, Hubert Pierlot, had been on familiar terms. First, incompatibility of principles. Pierlot was infatuated with the rights of parties and the government of parties. King Leopold respected the Constitution, but he felt a visible detestation for the political machine. His private dream would have been to have under his sceptre a government responsible before Parliament, but composed of extra-parliamentary men: disciplined senior officials, businessmen personally attached to the Crown. Since, for the time being, he had to be satisfied with ministers delegated by elected politicians, the King had cleverly remedied this inconvenience by placing, between the parliamentary government and himself, Government No. 2, which was his Private Cabinet.

The history of Leopold III is the history of his Private Cabinet. A man such as Baron Frédéricq, a revived Mayor of the Palace, played a much more important role in the conduct of the Belgian State than any Prime Minister officially in office. Not a decree passed unless it had first been dissected and approved by the King's chief of cabinet. Otherwise it went into oblivion, sometimes even without Leopold III's knowledge. In fact, the key to power was in that man's pocket. An exorbitant power under a democratic regime, a dangerous power in many respects, for this Frédéricq was, at the Royal Palace, the delegate of the most formidable of all secret societies, the Twenty-Ninth degree of Freemasonry.

The climate which made possible the rupture of May 1940 between the Crown and the government partly originated in this conflict of powers: "democratic" power, emanating from the parties, on one side; royal power on the other, a power also constitutional, but monopolized and swollen by the conclavists of the Monarch's Private Cabinet. The King--sometimes irascible, sometimes lymphatic--although he sometimes complained of the invasive character of the Frédéricq government, was nevertheless very attached to this method.

The situation became more complicated, from the beginning of neutrality, by the creation, in September 1939, of a sort of third Belgian government, a military government this time. The King, commander-in-chief of the armies, converted the General Staff into a kind of secret directorate, whose head was his aide-de-camp, General Van Overstraeten, taking, over the head of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and even the Minister of War, politico-military decisions of capital importance, totally hidden from Government No. 1. Such was the case with the first secret talks conducted in autumn 1939 with the French generalissimo Gamelin, followed by the strange installation, behind the backs of the Belgian ministers, of a direct agent of the French military chiefs near Leopold III, Lieutenant-Colonel Hautcoeur. Such was the case with the secret proposals made by King Leopold to England and France on January 14, 1940, proposals of which the Pierlot government knew nothing, and which Leopold III still fiercely denied for some time after Spaak had been informed of this royal initiative thanks to Daladier's asinine stupidity.

Such was finally the case with the unbelievable orders which the King had issued to the troops on the southern frontier, by radio messages sent in clear text during the night of January 13-14, 1940, to remove all defensive barriers and let the Allied troops enter when they presented themselves. Neither Pierlot, nor Spaak, nor General Denis had heard anything about this initiative. If the French troops had advanced as planned, they would have entered Belgium freely. The government would have been committed to the war without knowing it.

The King had had this incredible decision taken at a meeting of the General Staff. It was not only a military decision, but a political one. If Daladier had used the authorization given to him, Pierlot and Spaak would have woken up on January 14, 1940, seeing French tanks pouring over the Brussels pavement from their windows.

Obviously, for a somewhat sensitive government, that was hard to swallow. It is clear that the King was acting for the good of the country. But it is indisputable that such intrusions made the work of the ministers very complicated.

To this divergence over principles were added, on the eve of hostilities, incompatibilities of character. The King, naturally neurasthenic, was stubborn. More than that: he was crafty, readily resorting to obscure maneuvers. It was very difficult to know what he wanted, especially since he himself was capable, within twenty-four hours, according to the evolution of events, of wanting, with great energy, very different things. He hid his game. More serious still--the word is strong, but truth is truth, and to conceal this would be to distort a portrait that must be objective and to make incomprehensible certain events that otherwise cannot be understood--the King was capable of saying the opposite of the truth with absolutely astonishing assurance.

The order to open the southern frontier, on the night of January 13-14, is a typical example: the King denied everything, very energetically, to his ministers. He even had an innocent man, General van den Bergen, publicly punished in order to divert suspicion. He played the surprised and indignant man, had General van den Bergen struck down, although in this affair he had merely been his executing agent, pure and simple.

That is one case. There were ten similar cases. All those who knew the King and who are not court doormats can give astonishing details on this subject, often comic ones.

These evasions, these continual subterfuges, were very much in the King's character. He is not the first king to have behaved in this way. Louis XI, so admired by the French, did much more. One finds

historians who see a virtue in it.

Someone other than Pierlot would probably have been capable of smoothing the corners, of restoring a minimum of confidence in relations between the Sovereign and his ministers. A Spaak, for example, flowing like silk, pulling a box of perfumed ointment from each of his pockets, generally knowing how to say things with kindness, politeness, and humor.

Unfortunately, Pierlot did not have that talent. He was a born grumbler. Merely looking at him, one endured his bad humor. His bony face and his jowls with long perpendicular folds, falling like the dead branches of a weeping willow, his colorless and dismayed eyes, his bitter, hanging mouth, gave off a spell of ill luck that cut the arms and legs from his interlocutor. With him, everything had to fail, the soup had to burn, the roof had to fly off, the chimneys had to collapse, the cows had to give birth to calves without heads.

The worst of it was that his character corresponded to his mug. A bundle of thorns, a perpetual snuffer, knowing only how to scold, gossip, drivel, bore, and on top of that authoritarian, abrupt, sly, Pierlot was bound to drive the King and his entourage to exasperation. Where one had to be charming, he was bilious, harsh, creaking like an out-of-tune piano. Where one had to throw in a clever or funny word, he served up, like a preacher, murderous tirades on the spirit and the letter of the Constitution. Always morose. Always sharp and snappish, stiff as a stoneware pipe, gloomy as a coffin.

An honest man, in the sense that he had not--to my knowledge--pinched anyone's wallet or offended good morals. Paved with good intentions, probably. For the rest, a scourge from heaven: painted in the colors of misfortune, able to preside only over catastrophes.

When war poured over Belgium on May 10, 1940, Pierlot, by dint of gloom and blunders, had finished disgusting the King with parliamentary governments, parties, and the whole democratic bric-a-brac. The Sovereign had grown used to making his decisions in silence, tête-à-tête only with his Private Cabinet or with his General Staff. The break was unknown to the public, but it was clear. Pierlot's clumsiness would hasten the outcome and transform a personal vaudeville into a noisy national drama, which would continue long after the war. It was this political conflict, much more than the capitulation of May 28, 1940, that was to remove Leopold III from his throne.

The King had treated the Government and Parliament rather cavalierly on the first day of hostilities, categorically refusing to deliver the speech that Pierlot, blunderer as always, had tried to impose on him out of hand. He did not even agree to attend the solemn session of the Chambers.

In the eyes of those gentlemen with tricolor sashes, Belgium's entry into the war meant, above all, a parliamentary session full of pathos, sonorous words for future history textbooks, the hall standing, mopping itself, acclaiming. In this kind of colored print, one needs a king, royal children, preferably in white, cavalcades, gala uniforms around the coach. Otherwise it is a failure.

It was a failure. Certainly, the King, cautious since the German rush through Denmark and Norway, had not wanted, on the occasion of such a speech, to launch himself into additional commitments toward the Allies, already very clearly divining their coming disasters. But his absence from Parliament could also be explained very officially. It was enough to state that at the moment when Belgian troops were receiving the first battering-ram blow of the Wehrmacht and when the fate of the country was being played out at the front, it was hardly appropriate for the King to leave his military command post in order to come to the Palace of the Nation, in Brussels, to indulge in exercises in rhetoric.

But for Pierlot, the war, on May 10, 1940, was, above all, his session of the Chambers: President Van Cauwelaert, a rotten shark on the bank of honors, solemn on his perch, his guts full of pathos; the dazed deputies, crimson with emotion; the senatorial dotards coughing, their eyes watering; the painted old turkeys in the galleries, eyelids like oyster shells, shrieking with agitation, squeezing their devastated backsides between the benches. The King had not added to this brilliant spectacle his képi, his sword, his wine-red Grand Cordon, and the redundant phrases Pierlot had polished for him. A war begun by such a denial of the essential was bound to turn out badly. In any case, Pierlot considered the King's abstention from these festivities an outrage against democratic rites.

A speech by the King before Parliament, or a simple message drafted in his name by others, could certainly have done some good; but the presence of the Commander-in-Chief at the head of his troops was just as desirable. The trouble is that the excellent reasons put forward to excuse Leopold III's absence do not stand up. The King, who had not had a minute to come from Brendonck to Brussels for a solemn session of Parliament, did indeed come to Brussels that afternoon. He came there... to take tea with his mother, Queen Elisabeth, at her Villa des Palmiers, in Laeken Park. Pierlot, thank God, did not know it.

This was only an incident. The great fight was to break out five days later, when Pierlot took it into his head to dictate the conduct of operations to the King.

Article 68 of the Belgian Constitution is formal: "The King commands the land and sea forces, declares war, and makes treaties of peace, alliance, and commerce." At the front, Leopold III was therefore lord and master.

It might have been tolerable for Pierlot to come to General Headquarters to give his opinion to the responsible tacticians if he had been a great man of war. But he had fought the 1914-1918 campaign as a vague junior officer in the second line and knew nothing of strategy. On top of that, he totally lacked that minimum of imagination and intuition without which the brain is only a dead tool.

One can therefore imagine the amazement of the senior officers at General Headquarters when they saw our cab driver step down from a limousine in front of their command post at Brendonck, gravely nodding his petrified dyspeptic's head.

He was accompanied by the Minister of National Defense, General Denis, the least warlike man who existed in the world, a sort of retired registrar of mortgages, with the skull of a sparrow. He was a Minister of War as democracy likes them: somewhat senile, harmless, mumbling, rambling, quavering.

Once war has arrived, such little old fathers no longer count. General Denis's ministry had, from the first morning of hostilities, sunk into complete anarchy. The King commanded. The General Staff directed. Denis had continued sucking his jujubes and drinking his chamomile, in incoherence and ignorance. Pierlot, looking for help, had loaded him into his car that day.

Leopold III had the genius of arms. He was, unquestionably, the most clear-sighted man on the Allied side in 1940. On May 15, he already knew where things stood regarding his partners' chances. In four days, the panzers had run from the Eifel to the Meuse, crossed the river, conquered Sedan, and completely burst through the northern complement of the Maginot Line. The whole French defensive system had been pierced. How could the German armor be stopped where no obstacle existed, when it had not been possible to hold it back for a single day where enormous concrete works existed,

supported by tank divisions and by the bulk of Gamelin's troops?

In 1939 and 1940 the Reich was using an absolutely new war tactic, against which the Allies had nothing to oppose. The Polish experience had already been very significant. The Norwegian one still more so. In five days, in May 1940, proof had been given that an armored flood could no more easily be stopped in Holland, Belgium, or France than it had been in the east and north of Europe. The only somewhat serious French obstacle in the Northeast, the concrete system at Sedan, had popped like a champagne cork. From then on it was only a question of massive pounding by the Luftwaffe, bold arrows launched by the tanks, reduction of the pockets formed by them, and the convoying of the necessary reserves, munitions, and fuel.

The preceding campaigns had shown that the average pace of such an advance was about fifteen kilometers a day during the critical period. Then, in the last days of the campaign, came suddenly the fan-out, the kill at full gallop. It was enough, as a mere amateur, to have studied the campaigns of Poland and Norway to foresee the campaign of France once the usual unfolding of the ruptures of the first days had been repeated. On May 15, the war of 1940 was lost.

The King had the operational map before his eyes. He could follow the enemy movement exactly. He was not deceived for an instant. Tracing on the map, with his finger, a line from Sedan to the Pas-de-Calais, he calmly said to Pierlot, pointing to the mouth of the Somme: "They will arrive there within eight days."

Pierlot, for his part, was still at the stage of the eternal and invincible poilu, of the Madelon, of "moral values" vaporizing air squadrons and panzer armor. Merely doubting the victory of the French Command--two hundred generals prisoners in four weeks--seemed to him a frightful crime. To foresee the arrival of the German armor at the Pas-de-Calais--exactly seven days after Leopold III's prediction, it would be there--was, in Pierlot's eyes, a display of abominable "defeatism." "The King's horrible perspicacity," Spaak would say at Limoges on May 31.

Yet this perspicacity had not only had nothing horrible about it; it had nothing especially perspicacious about it. The King was stating the obvious, not making a prophecy. Pierlot, crushed by the King's realistic remarks, could have tried to understand or kept silent. He judged it more appropriate to dictate their conduct to the General Staff and the King, indicating to them the direction to follow if retreat became necessary. King Leopold was perfectly aware that a retreat toward the South was no longer feasible: already the German panzers were running toward Péronne; the passage would be cut by the Reich's motorized columns long before the hundreds of thousands of Belgian soldiers could carry out a withdrawal movement from the Campine to the Oise. To Pierlot, this lack of faith in the invincibility of Gamelin's footsloggers appeared an act of diabolical perversity. The King did not wish, that day, to rush his strategist in a bowler hat. He did not insist. Pierlot departed, more funeral-parlor than ever, his eye sliding down into the pocket of his waistcoat. On May 16, Pierlot's car again stopped in front of General Headquarters, still at Brendonck. The King and his generals were concerned with containing an enemy who was rushing toward them from all sides. They had no time to lose in technical discussions with incompetent civilians. The undertaker and his general escaped from an old people's asylum were accompanied by Paul-Henri Spaak, Minister of Foreign Affairs, as little military as possible.

So there they are, all three planted before Leopold III, who that day performs prodigies in order to remain calm. He cannot announce to Pierlot that Gamelin has just conquered Hanover at bayonet point. No. The French disaster is even clearer than the day before. The King's staff is neither optimistic nor

pessimistic, but realistic. A general attached to the King's person, pointing out the Belgian coast to Pierlot on the map, declares to him, as a tactician who has weighed everything meticulously: "There, in eight days, the campaign is over for us."

Once again, it would be so: exactly eight days later, on the night of May 24-25, Pierlot, Spaak, and Denis, having taken refuge at precisely the place where, on the map, the general had placed his finger, would pack their bags and take to their heels, fleeing Belgium, abandoning to its sad fate, before the capitulation, the country they governed. But on May 16, hearing the reasonable forecasts made in front of them, Pierlot chokes, Spaak chokes, Denis chokes. In their eyes, these generals are lamentable quitters. Spaak said it word for word, Pierlot repeated it: "At General Headquarters, on May 16, there reigned an atmosphere of appalling defeatism."

"Appalling defeatism!" because, man to man, King Leopold and his principal collaborators, as soldiers, had honestly shown the situation as it was, alas, to ministers who begged to be informed.

But Pierlot had not come only to be enlightened on the situation. He climbed back onto his hobbyhorse of the day before: flight. "Do everything to escape the German grip by retreating southward onto French territory." And there he is harassing the King like a hornet, suggesting the withdrawal--of more than half a million infantrymen--hundreds of kilometers toward France, as if it were a matter of maneuvering a squadron of light horse. The King wisely replies that the first duty of the Belgian army--and of the King of the Belgians--is to defend Belgian soil, not to improvise a headlong gallop toward foreign soil. Pierlot clings to his ridiculous project: if all the Belgian troops cannot be launched into this flight, then "at least part of the army should escape!"

If such a harebrained plan had received even the beginning of execution, one can imagine the indescribable mess that would have resulted. Such a retreat would have created unspeakable disorder among the millions of refugees and friendly soldiers jammed at the frontier, and our troops, in the end, would have broken their noses against the barrier already thrown across the road south by the armored columns of Guderian and Rommel.

Leopold III saw the French corridor narrowing from hour to hour. To reach it in time, even with a few divisions, was not among the things possible.

Finally, a reason that settled everything: King Leopold belonged militarily to a whole and was subject to Generalissimo Gamelin's plan. Personally, he was under the orders of the French general Billotte, commander-in-chief of the Belgian, French, and English troops on the northern front. Billotte would not have accepted certain Belgian units taking flight in this way, leaving less well-equipped units face to face with Hitler's shock troops.

The King had moreover just received General Billotte's retreat orders, which corresponded exactly to his own ideas on the situation: withdraw by stages from east to west, by the Willebroek Canal, the Dendre, the Terneuzen Canal, and the Scheldt. From Holland to the Oise there moved an enormous mass of Allied combatants. One had to be Pierlot to imagine for a second that this million men and its immense matériel could be transported in three or four days from Middelburg or Antwerp, or Louvain, or even Gembloux, to Beauvais or Château-Thierry. Even the French motorized troops, in combat in Walloon Brabant and therefore the closest to the Somme, would not manage it and would have to surrender to the Germans, at Lille, at the end of May.

Pierlot further demanded that the King, first of all, should make his way to a safe shelter. In the middle

of combat, when the personal presence of the head of the army constituted the most important moral element of Belgian resistance, Leopold III should have, "either with part of his troops, or, if necessary, by leaving the army, moved to free territory" as soon as the affair turned bad.

First, the affair was already irreparably bad. Next, the King was at the head of his soldiers. To leave them in this way at the critical moment, at the moment when he was asking them to die clinging to the ground, would have constituted an ignominy on his part.

Leopold III did not wish, that day either, to rush Pierlot, who persisted in giving him as an example old Queen Wilhelmina, a refugee in London--half against her will, moreover. In any case, the Queen of Holland was a grandmother and not the commander-in-chief of an army. Furthermore, the Dutch example was hardly encouraging: the Queen having fled, everything had collapsed in the Netherlands, on only the fourth day of hostilities. It is probable that the Belgian army, already very demoralized, crushed day and night by the enemy's powerful air force, seeing itself abandoned in the middle of battle by its chief, would have immediately sunk into anarchy. This was the time, now or never, to keep a cool head. It was particularly important, at the hour when the Allies' chances were shrinking day by day, to take on no new commitment. We were bound, morally, to defend our soil, that is all. "Having entered the war because invaded and in order to defend herself," the King repeated to Pierlot, "Belgium has undertaken no commitment toward her guarantors other than that of defending the national territory."

"The King," one reads literally in Leopold III's notes, summarized by the Royal Commission, "drew the Government's attention to the danger there would be in allowing itself to be incorporated into the Franco-English alliance in any capacity whatsoever, the greatest prudence being required in view of the uncertainty of events.

"He insisted that in any hypothesis no alliance should be concluded, Belgium having to preserve her freedom of action, all the more so because neither London nor Paris seemed, so far, disposed to give us the desired guarantees concerning Belgium's future."

The King was concerned above all--this was normal and his duty commanded it--with the interest of the Belgians. Pierlot, by contrast, clinging to the chandeliers of 1918, thrown into confusion by the violence of events, would have sacrificed the Belgian army, Belgian territory, and the political freedom of the Belgian State in order to cling to the frayed coat-tails of an adventurer like Reynaud and the star-studded schoolmaster Gamelin, who were sinking straight down into the muddied waters of the Somme.

Leopold III declared, on May 16 at noon, to Henri de Man: "I intend to remain on Belgian territory... I shall resist there as long as I can, but I want to spare lives, at least not to sacrifice them uselessly, even if one should end by capitulation." Profoundly human words, words of astonishing lucidity, for the following month it would not be he alone, but France also, with her five million soldiers, that would capitulate.

Pierlot and Spaak left the King after endlessly rehashing their proposals, succeeding only in exasperating the entire General Staff.

Events were about to accelerate. The day after this second visit to General Headquarters, the Pierlot government entrenched itself at the extreme end of Belgium. The evening before, it had been a crime to foresee that the army, within eight days, might be driven back to the coast. The next morning, Pierlot and Spaak were running there, their bellies brushing the dune grass. Farther than they, for three miles'

depth, there was no native life left except the shrimps, soles, and cod of the Belgian coast. From so far away, Pierlot had no resource that day except to pursue the King by letter.

Meanwhile, General Headquarters had withdrawn to Saint-Denis-lez-Gand. Pierlot and his two accessories climbed back into their car, on the afternoon of May 18, and ran--third visit in four days--to King Leopold's command post. A few German bombs had fallen at Ostend, near the new government offices. Pierlot was extremely busy. The King granted him, without smiling, authorization to dispatch all his bellicose scribes at once into French territory. But he required that at least four ministers remain in the country, for any useful purpose.

That detail settled, Pierlot--a true cerebral monolith, whom arguments no more dented than centuries dented the obelisk of Luxor--returned once again to his hobbyhorse of disengagement toward the South at any cost, "going," the King recounted, "so far as to propose the immediate abandonment of the occupied positions in order to pass into France as soon as possible, without waiting for the orders or instructions of the generalissimo." Seven years later, in 1947, Pierlot, vomited up by his compatriots, would still obstinately defend such insanities, having still not realized, despite the passage of time, the catastrophe that would have resulted from them.

Already on May 15, Leopold III quite reasonably considered the campaign of 1940 finished, the French disaster being certain. On May 18, the German panzers had passed Péronne. The King's pessimism had increased still further. In any case, the Sovereign was no longer in the mood, with France lost, to defend anything other than Belgian soil. Perhaps even, as Gamelin suggested, he would have preferred, in his heart of hearts, to finish the campaign at Brussels, his capital, where he would have awaited encirclement.

As for the King's personal case, however persuasive Pierlot tried to make himself, Leopold III answered that to abandon his army in the middle of the tornado would be treason on his part. The interview ended there.

Two days later, on May 20, 1940, the three ministers paid a new visit, this time at Saint-André-lez-Bruges, where G.H.Q. had just installed itself in haste.

Then the mustard went up the noses of all the generals. The King and his collaborators were at the breach night and day. For the fourth time, Pierlot returned to the charge with the same refrain and always more out of place. On May 20, Cambrai had been taken. Rommel was in the process of chopping through, with his panzers, the last kilometers still separating him from the French coast. A sortie toward the South was absolutely no longer possible. Even by making a leap of one hundred or one hundred fifty kilometers in a day, the Belgian troops would have arrived too late. The map was there under Pierlot's nose, tragically eloquent.

Nothing to be done. Stealing from the King his hours of inestimable value, Pierlot, motionless as a bridge pier, resumed without pause his tiring litany--retreat toward France, retreat toward France--while they showed him on the map, every five minutes, that the passage was already virtually barred one hundred and fifty kilometers behind the Belgian lines.

For the first time, the King became irritated, shrugged his shoulders, and launched very sharp words at Pierlot, especially when the latter resumed his proposal to split the army in two, leaving the least mobile divisions to be crushed on the spot while the best units fled to France.

The King, regaining his calm, dismissed Pierlot, announcing to him that he had an appointment with the new generalissimo Weygand and with General Gort. After this interview, he would no doubt be in a position to make his intentions known. The three hares therefore went away. But the names of Weygand and Gort had not fallen on deaf ears.

It was the next day, May 21, that this Weygand-Gort-Leopold III meeting was to take place at Ypres. It was a strictly military meeting, to which civilians were not invited. Weygand had not invited the dwarf Reynaud. Gort had not invited the bulldog Churchill.

Yet, even before Weygand and Gort had arrived, three stunned faces appeared in the town hall lobby. They were our musketeers. Them again.

On what grounds should they be received? They were not permitted to take part in the deliberation being held in a neighboring room. They therefore had to wait. Years later, bravely narrating this scene of painful vaudeville, Pierlot would write, still wounded in his dignity: "The King admitted us to none of his conversations with the Allied generals. Despite the humiliating position in which the ministers thus found themselves placed, it was not the moment to abandon the game!"

Ah, no, he does not abandon the game. He harasses those who enter, those who leave, clings to General Weygand's belt, to General Billotte's buttons. General Van Overstraeten, King Leopold's aide-de-camp, has the charity to come for a moment and keep our bores company. It is to hear always the same insanities: "Can the retreat movement not be accelerated, can one not act on one's own initiative?"

For Pierlot and Spaak are still there. It is the evening of May 21. At that moment, everything is finished. The Wehrmacht has conquered Abbeville and Amiens, on the south bank of the Somme, and, at the bottom of the Pas-de-Calais, Rommel has just carried Montreuil, near the sea. Van Overstraeten looks at them, wondering whether these two men still have their common sense. "It is better," Pierlot and Spaak continue, "it is better to fall back than to be captured." The King's aide-de-camp cannot help answering flatly: "But we are captured!" It is obvious. Rommel's iron wall has cut the troops of the North from the troops of the South. Two million French soldiers could not prevent this formidable breakthrough. But Pierlot, crimson with fury, cries to the general: "No, we are not captured! No, we are not captured!"

The case is incurable. Van Overstraeten shrugs his shoulders and leaves the salon without another word.

Night has fallen. Weygand leaves after rallying to King Leopold's proposal: resistance by the Belgian army on Belgian soil. Meanwhile, the English and French forces located in the Oise and Artois, immediately on both sides of the rupture line, will try to cut Rommel's arrow and re-establish the connection. That is the only sensible solution.

Now at least, the die being cast, one imagines that Pierlot and Spaak will go away. Never in life. Pierlot himself recounted the scene that followed with his usual unconsciousness: "After General Weygand's departure, the ministers were introduced to the King. They complained of the insufficient manner in which they were being kept informed of the march of events. M. Spaak sharply reproached the King for the lack of confidence he was showing toward the ministers. The King protested, saying that the ministers had his confidence, but that he had his own proper powers in the conduct of military operations."

Could a wiser answer have been given? Under what pretext, by what right, would two Belgian politicians, without military competence, have been admitted to a meeting of the inter-Allied General Staff when no English or French minister took part in it?

But Pierlot and Spaak are ineradicable. General Gort has not yet arrived. They are going to wait for him. Meanwhile they overwhelm the Sovereign with harebrained remarks on the necessity of unleashing toward the South the eternal retreat--the mirage of our troops, "tired, but in no way exhausted."

With angelic patience, Leopold III restrains himself from exploding. "The King," Pierlot recounted, "did not reply, but appeared very displeased. The conversation then slowed and even ceased completely. The King nevertheless kept the ministers near him."

At last General Gort is announced. The King withdraws with him to study the situation. After which he has the kindness to receive Pierlot and Spaak once more, so that they will know nothing less than the decisions taken: Gort rallies--theoretically--to the idea of a Franco-English operation to try to break the German barrier on the Somme, while the Belgian troops will bear, in its entirety, the German blow on the Lys, to the west. Nevertheless, it is visible that Gort envisages the operation only as a matter of conscience: "The English general," the King concludes, "considers that the chances of success of the maneuver in which he is going to take part are practically nil. The situation is desperate."

Only then, after an assault that has lasted nearly ten hours, do Pierlot and Spaak decide to leave.

Leopold III has regained his G.H.Q. He is exasperated. The two fellows, Pierlot above all, have overstepped the bounds of discourtesy and stupidity. The King addresses to them a very harsh letter, in an extremely disillusioned tone.

He has had enough and decides not to make known to his ministers the location of his new command post. It is now May 24. For three days Leopold has signified his bitterness and anger to Pierlot. For three days he has cut off all contact with the Government. During the afternoon of that day, the German divisions break the Belgian front between Menin and Courtrai. The fatal outcome is near. Pierlot and Spaak panic, decide to flee the next morning to Dunkirk, where they want to embark on a ship placed at their disposal by the British Admiralty. But, rather confused at being so afraid and sensing how false their situation is, they would like to drag the King with them, as a kind of hostage. But where is the King?

Pierlot harasses the offices by telephone throughout the evening of the 24th. At last he reaches an officer on duty at G.H.Q. The latter refuses to communicate the King's address to the Prime Minister. He has orders. Enraged, Pierlot feverishly leafs through the telephone directory. He finally discovers that the number he has reached must be that of the château of a small village situated south of Bruges. This village is called Wynendaele.

The King has been there since the previous day and has lunched there with Henri de Man, installed under his roof.

At three in the morning, Pierlot, Spaak, Denis, a fourth minister who had remained with them--a good and gentle man, M. van der Poorten--and the cohort of their familiars hastily buckle their luggage. At four o'clock, they leave Bruges. In the countryside, despite the nearby war, everything is still calm: small enclosed farms with blue or brown shutters, pale oat fields, cavalry elements silently reforming,

first chirpings in the hedgerows, the bright eye of a swallow chick looking, from the edge of a blond nest, at the brown road, the human agitation, the slender sun whitening the young elms.

Around five o'clock, the column of ministerial cars stops. The Château of Wynendaele is there, below the road, a large gloomy building with powerful crenellated towers. Strange stories of ghosts and revenants have made it famous in the region. The greenery of a beautiful garden, damp and sad, encloses it. Pierlot, Spaak, Denis, and Van der Poorten get out, cross the enclosure, enter a dark corridor. One of the most dramatic interviews in the history of Belgium is about to take place.

They, for their part, must be relatively fresh, having had, for eight days, no other worries than their little personal case, their funk, and their strategico-political combinations. They no longer have ministries to direct, orders to give. Since May 10, they have let everything drift. The King, by contrast, has reached the extreme limit of his strength. Sick with nerves for several years, treated as such by specialists, these fifteen days of military rout and governmental worries have put him at the end of his tether. For several nights he has no longer slept. He frightens his entourage--Henri de Man above all--by his starts and depressions. That night he has been at work almost without respite. Everywhere the Belgian front is cracking. The reserves have been totally committed. The enemy has crossed the Lys, is pouring into deep breaches. The King struggles against defeat, crushing, strangulation. It is then, at the moment when he would like to take a brief rest before facing a desperate day, it is then that Pierlot's arrival at the château is announced to him. The King comes down into the large salon on the ground floor. His eyes are wild, his hair in disorder.

The King insisted on receiving the ministers standing, to signify to them that the interview displeased him and his desire that it be brief. During the interview, Spaak, collapsed, at the end of his nerves, would ask permission to sit down. Each would then take a seat: "M. Spaak," Leopold III wrote in his report, "was completely dejected, lying back, his head thrown back, in an armchair, his arms hanging down; he uttered disjointed phrases."

From the first minute, Pierlot, Spaak, Denis, and Van der Poorten ran up against the Sovereign's unshakable will to share the fate of his army, even if it had to capitulate. He had given his word to his soldiers to remain among them, whatever happened. He would not fail that oath. The attitude is one of great nobility. A sentimental attitude, the ministers reply. The King has other duties, the first of which is to continue the fight beside the allies and to represent politically, among them, Belgium at war.

There too Leopold III does not agree. For him, first, Belgium's commitments are limited to the defense of our soil. Second--and this is the essential point of the royal reasoning--to flee to the Allies would no longer serve any purpose, because they too are lost. France is going to succumb very shortly, exactly like Belgium. England will doubtless continue the struggle, but it will be an extra-continental, maritime, colonial struggle, a struggle with which Belgium no longer has anything to do.

Such is the King's point of view. He is going to remain with his soldiers because, from the Belgian point of view and from the point of view of the continent, "the war is over," because under these conditions "he can better serve the interests of the fatherland from inside than from outside."

He formulated his reasoning in these lapidary phrases, stated clearly and slowly, recorded by Pierlot in his report and admitted by the Royal Commission: "Within a short time, perhaps in a few days, France will in turn have to give up the struggle. Doubtless the war will continue, not on the continent, but on the seas and in the colonies. That war may be long; it will be foreign to Belgium's possibilities of intervention and, consequently, Belgium's role is finished... There is no longer any place in all this for

an attempt to continue the war alongside the Allies."

Not that the King ever thought for a single instant of turning against his partners. He would affirm forcefully then and throughout the war: "We have the desire not to associate the country with any action against those who stood at its side during the battle." But he had fulfilled all his commitments; he was going to succumb, not through his own fault, but because this war had been set up with unimaginable lightness and because, from the first fortnight of hostilities in the West, the French had been broken through from Sedan to the mouth of the Somme, thereby allowing the armies of the Reich to encircle all the troops of the northern front. The King is convinced that the French collapse will be--and his forecast, once again, proves rigorously exact--only a matter of days, and that the war, even admitting that it continues, will in any case be transported outside Belgium's field of action. "The King," concluded the Royal Commission, "considered that in the event of capitulation, Belgium could no longer help the Allies militarily and that, from this military point of view, the war was over for her."

Events, in 1944, disproved this reasoning. But this reasoning, in May 1940, was just and sensible. Who, at that moment--when the thin English troops that had come to the continent were hastily making for the coast without authorization from the generalissimo, without having warned their fighting neighbors, abandoning almost all their matériel--who would have imagined that the U.S.S.R., Hitler's powerful supplier in 1940, would one day unite with the English against Hitler, and that following a Japanese aggression fifteen thousand kilometers from the banks of the Thames, the United States would throw into the struggle against the Third Reich the most fabulous matériel ever possessed by an assailant?

These events, absolutely unforeseeable then, later gave Pierlot and Spaak the material advantage. But in 1940, quite obviously, it was King Leopold who reasoned correctly.

He reasoned so correctly that, less than a month later, France would collapse as Leopold III had announced. As for Pierlot and Spaak, they too would believe so much that "the war was over" that they would throw themselves at the Germans' feet, begging for the favor of signing a peace treaty with them, ready to undergo the most humiliating conditions. From a human point of view, Hitler in 1940 was bound to win the war. England, driven back onto her island, without a serious army, could only, admitting that the Germans did not land there, retreat into her fogs. The rest--Americans, Bolsheviks--did not enter into account. On the contrary. The Soviets were helping the Third Reich with all their strength. Molotov was telegraphing Ribbentrop the U.S.S.R.'s warm congratulations for the Wehrmacht's victories in Holland and Belgium. And meanwhile Roosevelt was refusing agonizing France not only military aid but the slightest, most distant promise of intervention.

King Leopold, observing the imminence and inescapable character of the continental disaster, having fulfilled all his commitments, considered, on May 25, 1940, that it would be madness to follow any farther, once his country was defeated, partners irretrievably condemned. "In that case, I do not see myself in France," he declared. He would be there only as a powerless exile: "If I do not remain in Belgium, I am convinced that I shall never return there," the King explained. And he added: "The Allied cause is lost."

By contrast, by remaining linked to his people, by staying at the heart of the place conquered by Hitler, he could still, perhaps, support morally, restore materially, and defend politically his invaded fatherland.

Leopold III had no link with Hitler. If he always admired him, he also feared him, almost morbidly. It would have been simpler and more agreeable for him, on May 25, 1940, to board a ship and go, in a

ranch in the United States or Canada, to await peacefully an eventual reversal of the situation and live, everything being lost, the comfortable life of a well-provided gentleman-farmer. One may say, not that Leopold III was mistaken, but that military interventions absolutely unforeseeable in May 1940 caused the continental war, won hands down by Hitler, to be followed by a second war, this one world-wide, quite distinct, which canceled the Führer's triumph after a five-year interval.

But what cannot be said is that there was any base feeling in Leopold III's attitude. He had fought as long as he could. He was bound in no way toward the Allies, simple guarantors of Belgian neutrality. Succumbing under the weight of the German mass, he proclaimed his will never to undertake anything against his former companions in arms, French and English. Certain that in the short term the continent would fall--and so it did--into Hitler's hands, he chose to remain among his defeated people in order to try to protect them and still serve them.

Pierlot and Spaak, for their part, had every right to believe in a new miracle of the Marne and to flee to France in order to participate in that unforeseeable counteroffensive. But they ought at least to have respected the man who, braving adversity, was running more real risks than theirs in order to be faithful to the conception he had formed, in all conscience, of royal duty and the service of the fatherland.

When one knows the customs of the political jungle, one is little tempted to see in the "fidelity" of Pierlot and Spaak to the Allied cause the true reason for the senseless conflict that, three days later, was to oppose the Belgian ministers, refugees in France, to their King, made prisoner by the Wehrmacht.

If Leopold III's reasoning was, in the eyes of his former collaborators, so monstrous, it should have continued to seem so to them the following month, when Pierlot and Spaak, at Bordeaux, dropped their English allies and proclaimed, they too, "that the war was over."

The fight at Wynendaele, while it marked the clash of two temporarily different conceptions concerning the Allies' possibilities of recovery, also and above all showed the rebellion of ambitions touched to the quick.

Great historical conflicts do not often have the disinterested origin that the credulous public is too tempted to see in them. Man is neither angel nor beast. On May 25, 1940, Pierlot and Spaak were not thinking only, in their seraphic hearts, of the noble Allied cause for which they were bravely fleeing their country. They were thinking also, and above all, of the ministerial portfolios they were clutching under their damp armpits.

From the moment the King declared, by allowing himself to be included in the capitulation, that "he could better serve the interests of the fatherland from inside than from outside," the question was automatically posed.

Leopold III is a neurotic, granted, but he is a man of common sense. He could not consider the war "finished" without envisaging political activity in an occupied Belgium that he wanted to serve "from inside." Hitler did not allow the King to accomplish this work. Yet it was, on May 25, 1940, Leopold III's sole concern. To quibble about this, to try to attribute to the King, at that moment, a fierce will to political abstention, is completely ridiculous. It is wanting to be more royalist than the King. Leopold III himself acknowledged, in his notes, that he had envisaged forming, after the capitulation, a collaborationist government. The direct witnesses, whose confidences I received in August and September 1940, were formal on this point. Whether one refers to the account of Wynendaele drawn up by the Royal Commission from the King's notes, or to Minister Pierlot's account devoted to the same

interview, Leopold III's will to have a government under the occupation is explicit.

What does the Prime Minister's report say? I quote word for word: "The ministers put the question: 'Will the King have a government in Belgium?' The answer: 'Yes, I am not a dictator.'"

What does the report of the Royal Commission say? "The King replied that he was not a dictator and that if he had to govern, he would obviously constitute a government, in the event that the ministers left him."

Since the King was deciding to brave the resentment of his former allies and remain with his people, it was not to twiddle his thumbs. To work, to govern, means, for a constitutional sovereign, to rely on a government. Only the intention of having a government could constitutionally justify Leopold III's gesture. His oath obliged him to fulfill his obligations as head of state. These took precedence over every consideration of a military order and especially of a sentimental order. He did not have the right, unless forced by strength, to surrender to the Germans solely in order to make "a fine gesture."

To his affirmation Leopold III added these words, which struck his interlocutors like a dart: "in the event that the ministers left him."

A personal argument. A direct argument. And there are the ministers--they who five minutes earlier considered it an abomination to remain in occupied Belgium--there they are launching at the King this astonishing question--it is Pierlot himself who reported the dialogue: "In the King's mind, this government cannot be the present government?"

Leopold III's answer falls, massive. In an instant, it makes Pierlot and his friends pass into the camp of the enemies of the royal cause: "It seems certain that the occupant would not consent to it."

The Sovereign's answer seems no less unlikely than his Prime Minister's question. For the King had had, until then, no contact with the Germans. Nothing therefore allowed him to affirm that the occupant would not consent. German propaganda had not yet attacked either Pierlot or Spaak. Why would Hitler consent that the King "serve from within," and not Pierlot, Spaak, and the other ministers? The King had compromised himself much more than they during neutrality. It was he, he above all, who had in fact broken neutrality by getting in touch with Gamelin and by inviting to Brussels, without his ministers' knowledge, the latter's liaison agent. It was he, he alone, who secretly appealed to the English in mid-January 1940--Hitler possessed then, as would later be learned, the proofs of these strange "neutral" initiatives of Leopold III. It was he, he alone finally, who, on the famous night of January 13-14, 1940, ordered--always without his ministers' knowledge--that the barriers on the southern frontier be removed and that French troops be allowed to advance onto our soil.

Far from rejecting Pierlot and Spaak, it is very probable that the Germans would have put them back in the saddle with pleasure, on May 28, 1940, if only to demoralize Allied opinion, even if later they asked them to modify or enlarge their team.

The King therefore did not throw his "it seems certain" at Pierlot's head because he was certain. He was not certain. He knew nothing. Nothing at all. He wanted to be rid of Pierlot and his government; that is the whole affair.

Pierlot and Spaak, transposing to Wynendaele the story of La Fontaine's grapes, which are "too green and good for louts," reply to the King, in rather comic fashion: "Neither do we!"

Then why had they asked the question a minute earlier?

Thereupon, having abandoned their last hope, Pierlot and Spaak throw themselves back into the Allied camp, the only one in which some chance remains for them to prolong their public life.

Counting on receiving only a vague and polite denial, they put this little hypocritical question to the King: "Should we resign?"

The King is in no mood to mince words or become tender. He answers, tit for tat, with icy precision: "That decision would be in the logic of the situation."

The ministers stagger. But they do not breathe a word. Portfolios first. To resign, for a politician, is worse than dying. The King no longer wants them. The King wants them to step down. Nothing remains for them except to clear out.

The King sees not the slightest inconvenience in their fleeing to France. It is absolutely all the same to him. The only feelings still animating the King toward them are immense weariness and--the future will show it--an insurmountable aversion. So, for pity's sake, let us be spared the fable of a Leopold III urging his ministers to rejoin the Allies so that they might continue the struggle beside them in Belgium's name.

For Spaak had still put this question: "If the present government continues the war in France, will that government still be the King's government?"

Leopold III, slowly, clearly detaching the words, let fall this terrible sentence: "No, that government will necessarily be against me."

These words are reported literally in Prime Minister Pierlot's account. De Man, who received the King's confidences that very day, reported them to me as well. King Leopold has never denied them nor had them denied. They are historical.

Pierlot and Spaak rush that very morning toward Dunkirk, after a brief stop at La Panne. They know that the King has definitively rejected them: "That government will be against me."

The sentence hums in their brains without respite, like a threnody by Ravel.

When Pierlot had asked him, on May 25 at five in the morning, how long his army could still resist, the King had answered: "At most twenty-four hours."

Yet, twenty-four hours later, the Belgian divisions were still locked hand to hand. Twenty-four hours later. And forty-eight hours later. And seventy hours later. Only on May 28 at four in the morning, that is, after a final combat of seventy-one hours, did Leopold III and his army resign themselves to the inescapable capitulation.

On May 25, however, everything was virtually consummated. Enormous breaches were bursting open, cutting into pieces the ninety kilometers of front held by the Belgians. Behind him, three million civilians, haggard refugees, annihilated soldiers, all frightfully mixed together, compressed into a space as restricted as a French department--not even seventeen hundred square kilometers in all, roughly two

thousand persons per square kilometer--were leading a carousel of madness, no longer knowing where to brace themselves, where to flee, hunted without respite on those flat lands, on that shining sand, by the howling squadrons of the Luftwaffe.

Each additional hour of resistance aggravated the massacres. All hope of changing anything whatever in the situation was lost. Nevertheless, Leopold III prolonged this agony for seventy-one hours in order to give the Allies time to withdraw, to free themselves from the net in which his army was perishing. They went so far as to push three thousand four hundred freight wagons end to end between Ypres and Roulers in the naive hope of thus containing the Wehrmacht's rush.

The Belgian troops sacrificed themselves, the Belgian refugees were immolated for seventy-one hours, not only so that the French divisions in Belgium could withdraw, protected by this desperate resistance, but also so that the English divisions, which had disengaged without warning anyone, could fall back comfortably toward Dunkirk.

Let this not be forgotten: it was the British, not the Belgians, who slipped away English-style. Only on May 27 did Churchill deign to telegraph Gort that it would nonetheless be time to say a word to the neighbors about the English maneuver of withdrawal toward England, then in full execution: "It is now necessary to warn the Belgians. It is desirable that you have personal contact with the King. Keyes will provide for it. We are asking them to sacrifice themselves for us."

That is word for word. These remarks are reproduced by Churchill himself in his Memoirs.

While the others were bolting, Leopold III, encircled since May 21, was still clinging to his Belgian sector. He clung there until May 28, while for more than a week Gort, for his part, had been decided on re-embarkation. He collapsed only after the superhuman effort of the last three days and the last three nights, an effort without any profit for Belgium.

A poignant night, a dramatic night, that of May 27-28, 1940. For more than ten hours, the last reserves having been exhausted, the Belgian front has been definitively broken at Maldeghem, at Ursel, at Roulers, at Thielt, where seven kilometers of lines, smashed in, without defenders, constitute a gaping hole. The King, death in his soul, has had to decide to send toward the enemy his deputy chief of staff, General Derousseaux, and an interpreter, Commandant Lacre. Around midnight, at the hotel of the Provincial Government in Bruges, General Derousseaux handed to the King--the latter had Henri de Man awakened--the little sheet of paper on which the German answer had been noted in pencil: "Der Führer verlangt bedingungslose Waffenstreckung" (The Führer demands unconditional laying down of arms). Nothing remains but to accept. At 12:45 a.m. (therefore on May 28) the Belgian emissary departed again. The capitulation would enter into force at four in the morning, Belgian time. But the King still wants to save the flags. In the middle of the night, thirty-seven standards are transported, according to the Sovereign's indications, to the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-André-lez-Bruges, where a monk will hide these relics until the end of the German occupation.

The King's command post is funereal. Only clusters of candles, planted in bottle necks, cut out the motionless silhouettes of the officers who must receive the tragic mission of carrying to the divisions the order to cease fire. As they are about to leave, the King appears in the doorway, passes slowly before these messengers of vanquished courage, fixes each gaze gravely, without loosening his lips. For the first time since the hostilities began, rain is falling, a fine rain. And one hears a voice in the half-light saying dully: "It is Heaven weeping over Belgium's fate..."

It was at the moment when this inhuman struggle was ending that Paul Reynaud's aggression occurred on French radio.

Scarcely had the Belgian army succumbed when one heard the pretentious and shrill voice of the French President of the Council proclaiming to the whole world the "felony" of Leopold III, guilty of having capitulated "in open country, without even warning his allies."

An integral lie. Since May 21, at Ypres, Leopold III had informed Weygand of the hopeless situation of his army, driven--because of the French defeated from Sedan to the Channel--toward a very imminent capitulation. Weygand was so convinced of the fatal outcome that on May 25, at the French War Committee meeting in Paris, he declared, word for word, in Reynaud's presence: "I have the duty to envisage the worst, that is to say what would happen if we no longer had at our disposal the troops that constitute the Northern Army Group."

Not only did Reynaud admit the prospect of this collapse, and did he declare that in Churchill's eyes as well the army of the northern front was caught in the German net, but he envisaged on the spot--on May 25--recourse to a Franco-German armistice, adding fearfully: "It is not certain that our adversary will grant us an immediate armistice."

It was Reynaud in person who spoke of an "immediate armistice" on May 25, while Leopold III, at the point of battle and not in a ministerial salon two hundred kilometers from the front, was launching to his troops his so noble order of the day: "Belgium expects you to do honor to her flag. Whatever happens, my fate will be yours."

From May 25--from the 21st even--all dispositions could have been taken by the Allies, both French and British. In order to leave them time to maneuver, Leopold III deliberately accepted a battle useless for him, useful only for Reynaud of the "immediate armistice" and for Gort of the flight toward Dunkirk and Folkestone.

This battle of Flanders, as the King knew in advance, could not restore the situation. The Germans were everywhere. To prolong the resistance by one day, by two days, was to have thousands of Belgian soldiers and civilians massacred, unable to move any longer, flattened by aviation and artillery in their bloody basin. (We are asking them to sacrifice themselves for us, as Churchill telegraphed.)

Leopold III resisted for the whole day of May 27 as well, in order to allow the French and English to take their measures before the imminence of the outcome.

They had been warned, on May 26 at noon, by a written note--delivered to the head of the French mission near Leopold III's G.H.Q.--which ended with this sentence: "The limits of resistance of the Belgian army are close to being reached."

As for the English, from the 25th, King Leopold had warned them as well. With Henri de Man's help, on the corner of a table, at Wynendaele, he had drafted for the King of England a very moving letter in which he said: "It is impossible to fall back any farther... Despite all the contrary advice I have received, I feel that my duty compels me to follow the fate of my army and remain with my people; to act otherwise would constitute desertion.

"I am convinced that I can better help my people by remaining with them than by trying to act from outside, particularly against the harshness of a foreign occupation."

This letter, dated from Saint-André-lez-Bruges, was transmitted at once by the English admiral Keyes, who gave King Leopold London's acknowledgment of receipt the next day, May 26.

The day after next, at half past noon, a telegram from the King warned General Gort, this time, of the imminence of the outcome: "Desperate situation. The moment approaches when the Belgian troops will be unable to fight. The King is going to find himself compelled to capitulate in order to avoid a debacle."

That same May 27, at half past two in the afternoon, notice to the French liaison office: "Belgian resistance is at its last extremity; our front is in the process of crumbling like a rope that breaks after complete wear."

At five o'clock--therefore eleven hours before the end--the King warns the French and English military missions that he has decided to send toward the German lines a plenipotentiary charged with asking for the cessation of hostilities.

General Champon, head of the French mission, immediately contacts Generalissimo Weygand and manages to speak with him by radio. In the report drawn up by Minister Marcel Héraud, of the French Council of Ministers, on the night of May 27-28, one reads in full: "Paul Reynaud: Today the King of the Belgians sent a note to the German Staff asking for the conditions of a capitulation of his armies. He informed General Weygand of it."

That is clear. And Reynaud's infamy, affirming the next morning, "This army has just suddenly capitulated without warning its French and English comrades in combat," is not debatable.

As for the English admiral Sir Roger Keyes, he would personally remain with the King throughout the whole of the last day, completely approving his attitude. He was kept informed of all the Sovereign's initiatives and left him, extremely moved, only at eleven o'clock at night.

Thus everyone knew, on the English side as well as on the French side, that Leopold III had been driven to capitulation. Churchill, in his Memoirs, formally recognized it: "The collapse [of the Belgian army] had been foreseen three days earlier; in one way or another, the breach was closed."

There was therefore neither felony nor surprise. But there was the low blow struck by Reynaud. He was seeking a scapegoat to take upon himself the anger of the French crowds. Without shame, he threw as prey to the public he had duped a defeated soldier who was in no position to answer him.

A hurricane of fury rose from all of France against a man who, although without illusion since May 15 about the outcome of the continental war, had done his duty as a soldier each day, with quite a different seriousness from the fugitives of the Meuse and the Somme.

Where Reynaud surpassed the bounds of ignominy was in the blackmail he exercised, concerning Leopold III, upon his British allies.

While the French military mission had left, already on May 27, without leaving an address, Keyes had remained until the last minute beside Leopold III. He was therefore able to make to Churchill a very objective report, wholly in praise of the King. Thus Churchill confined himself, on May 29, to declaring to the Commons: "We must not judge before we know the facts." This laconic declaration

was in fact a disavowal of Reynaud.

Learning that the man responsible for Churchill's moderate speech was Admiral Keyes, and knowing that the latter had not hesitated to give his opinion in the corridors of the Commons, Reynaud immediately had the following S.O.S. sent to the British Prime Minister: "At all costs prevent Admiral Keyes from defending King Leopold."

This appeal was confirmed by a message which, again at Reynaud's request, the British chargé d'affaires in Paris, R. Campbell, telegraphed to Churchill on May 29, 1940: "1. The press adviser reports that the Minister of Information has addressed to him an urgent appeal asking him to do the impossible to prevent emphasis being placed, in the British press and radio, on statements made in the corridors of Parliament by Admiral Keyes, who insists that judgment on King Leopold be suspended, and to prevent these statements even being mentioned in the French broadcasts of the B.B.C.

"2. M. Frossard fears that the views expressed by Admiral Keyes may be considered as a pardon and may therefore encourage defeatism here, at a moment when French opinion has been raised to anger--with as a consequence an improvement in morale--by disgust at this apparent treason."

Apparent treason. It was therefore solely, according to Frossard's expression, a matter of "provoking a nervous reaction" in order to obtain an "improvement in French morale."

Considering only the political objective to be attained, Churchill agreed to return to the rostrum of the Commons on June 4. There, despite everything he had learned from Keyes, he lowered himself so far as to take up on his own account the ignominies of Reynaud, whose plainly calumnious character he knew better than anyone. The analytical record of the Commons has preserved for us this piece of eloquence: "Suddenly, without prior consultation, without taking the advice of his ministers, on his own initiative, and without notice, he [King Leopold III] sent a plenipotentiary to the German command, surrendered with his army, and endangered our whole flank and all our means of retreat. (Cries of indignation.)

"Last week, I asked Parliament to suspend its judgment because the facts had not yet been elucidated. I believe that there is no longer any reason preventing us from expressing our opinion. (Cries: Shame! Shame!)"

Fortunately, for the honor of England, there were judges in the United Kingdom capable of courage and honesty. A newspaper, imitating the customs of the English Prime Minister, had taken Sir Keyes to task over Leopold III's capitulation. The Admiral took up the gauntlet. In wartime, he prosecuted the defamers. They, reduced to silence, had to retract publicly. And Judge Tucker solemnly made, in their name, on June 13, 1941, the following declaration: "A very grave injustice has been committed against the King of the Belgians, who, like Sir Keyes, has always acted in accordance with the highest traditions of honor and justice. Consequently, the defendants take this opportunity to present to King Leopold, who is no longer in a position to defend himself, their most sincere and respectful apologies."

In Reynaud's defense, it must be recognized that his calumnies attained the delirious diffusion we know, in France and in the world, only because Pierlot and Spaak publicly covered them, gave them a filthy "official" confirmation, and even insisted, they too, that Churchill take them up on his own account.

Reynaud was trying to save his filthy triangular Indochinese mug flattened by a bus. But he was not

Belgian. And he made use of every stick to get himself out of trouble. For a politician like him, the means matter little.

Whereas Pierlot and Spaak... They knew, from May 25, that the capitulation was imminent: Leopold III had left them three full days to repeat it to the Allied authorities--which they had done. They knew the courage of the Belgian army, the nobility of the attitude adopted by Leopold III.

It might just pass--which would not have been very elegant--for Pierlot and Spaak to have dissociated themselves from the imprisoned Leopold III and publicly regretted his decision. Instead, Pierlot outbid Reynaud, surpassed him in this championship of ignominy, and pushed infamy so far as to proclaim into the microphone: "The King has just opened negotiations and treated with the enemy."

Pierlot had been summoned like a lackey to Paul Reynaud's presence. He had to submit to him the text of his radio address. He agreed to make it still harsher, under the imperative dictation of that insolent little short-legs. If the Prime Minister of Belgium himself accused his King and his compatriots, then, in French eyes, it was truly proof that the Belgians had betrayed, that their Sovereign had betrayed, that their army had betrayed.

Three days later, on May 31, 1940, as if these infamies had not sufficed, Pierlot and Spaak repeated their exploit at Limoges, before nearly two hundred Belgian senators and deputies, gathered in a circus atmosphere, while loudspeakers transmitted to the French crowd massed outside the imprecations launched by these politicians.

"Lebrun [President of the Republic]: How did M. Pierlot envisage the future? Paul Reynaud: He is collapsed!" (Report of the French Council of Ministers on the night of May 27-28, 1940.) Reynaud, a few hours earlier, had purely and simply had Pierlot, already installed before the microphone, refused permission to speak: "At the moment when, at the appointed hour, I was going to speak on the radio, a communication reached me from the French Minister of National Information asking me to delay my declaration. The draft text communicated to M. Reynaud had been found by his government to lack clarity and to leave an ambiguity concerning the Belgian government's attitude in the presence of the King's act. The broadcast of my speech was postponed to 4:30 p.m.... In the afternoon the text was revised." (Pierlot, in Le Soir, July 16, 1947.)

Spaak especially distinguished himself in this fairground assembly, during which Leopold III was accused of "physical and moral deficiency."

At the request of the Pierlot government, an order of the day stigmatized the head of the Belgian army and proclaimed before the universe "the juridical and moral impossibility for Leopold III to reign."

Two and a half weeks would suffice for these unheard-of insults to go back down the throats of the blasphemers.

As Leopold had so exactly foreseen, the French army collapsed with dizzying speed. Fifteen days after May 28, Hitler's divisions entered Paris, fifes at their head. On June 16, they reached the Loire everywhere. In the east, the Maginot Line was not only turned, but broken through. The panzers with the Prussian cross rolled toward Lyon, toward Valence. Ministers and politicians cleared out, took to their legs. Pierlot and Spaak had fled to Poitiers first. Then they ran to Bordeaux, where they collided on June 17. The gnome Reynaud had collapsed in the meantime. They themselves were collapsing. Everything around them was collapsing.

It was then that the great theatrical coup occurred. Those who had so vilely outraged Leopold III twenty days earlier because, having fulfilled his duty, he had judged that he could no longer follow the Allies, were now, suddenly reversing themselves, denying in a few hours their very fresh Allied-loving oaths, going to abandon, without a word of apology, their British allies, who were resolved to continue the fight. The same Pierlot and Spaak who had falsely accused Leopold III of "opening negotiations and treating with the enemy" did not wait forty-eight hours, at Bordeaux, before rushing toward Hitler, in the hope of being able themselves to "open negotiations and treat with the enemy." On May 28, 1940, not standing united outside Belgium with the Allies constituted, if one listened to Pierlot and Spaak, a frightful crime. This crime they were ready to commit themselves, without the slightest shame, less than a month later. What they had refused to accept at Wynendaele when their chief, encircled with his soldiers, resigned himself to it, death in his soul, out of pure patriotism, they hastened to accomplish at Bordeaux, in order to follow the example of the French.

When Leopold III gave way, his act, for Pierlot and Spaak, was called treason. But a foreigner, whose name was Pétain, acted the same way, and it seemed quite natural to them to side with his opinion.

It is a direct witness, Minister Marcel-Henry Jaspar, who published shortly afterward, in the London Evening Standard, the declaration made by Pierlot to his colleagues in the Council of Ministers, at Bordeaux, on June 18, 1940: "I have turned the problem over several times. We will not leave for England. France has thrown in the sponge. We shall abandon the struggle with her."

Leopold III, head of the Belgian army, encircled without hope, threw in the sponge? Pierlot and Spaak disowned him, outraged him. Pétain, a foreign military man, still possessing a large part of his territory, threw in the sponge? At once Spaak and Pierlot imitated him, capitulated. An incredible conception of patriotic dignity.

But the affair was going to become more piquant. The attitude of Pierlot and Spaak, if their judges showed a little good will, could find its justification in the panic-stricken discouragement into which they suddenly found themselves plunged. It is difficult to see, however, how these same judges, the Belgians who continued to trust them, could forgive them what they did immediately afterward. For our men, without losing a minute, as ridiculous suppliants, comically reversing themselves, were going to throw themselves around the Führer's neck and beg for the Reich's support.

There are limits to shamelessness.

XVII

THE RUSH TOWARD HITLER

Fine oaths to the devil. - "Today, it is no longer a matter of fighting." - Confidences of Pierre Laval. - Discovery of the whole business at the Pétain trial. - Cascading revelations on Pierlot and Spaak's multiple approaches in order to arrange matters with the Germans. - Leopold III's stinging rebuff. - Approaches over the King's head. - The madness of Pierlot and associates' pro-German zeal. - Ready for a "Gauleiter" in a "Zollverein," "the most favorable hypothesis." - Pierlot and Spaak's offers rejected by the Germans.

In what way did the French capitulation free the Pierlot government from obligations whose sacred character it had loudly proclaimed at the time of the Belgian capitulation?

Either, as Leopold III had always affirmed, our commitments were limited to the defense of Belgian territory, and on May 28, 1940, they became void. Or, as Pierlot had so fiercely maintained, they implied for Belgium, even after being crushed, that she had to "continue the struggle as long as France and England continued to fight." Now France's debacle did not free Belgium from her commitments toward England. What was not lawful in May, according to Pierlot, when it concerned the King, could not become lawful in June because it concerned Pierlot. The commitment existed or did not exist, but it could not have a different value depending on the persons who would have to keep it.

In May, the question of Belgium's extra-territorial commitments was very debatable, the King having always denied them in the most categorical fashion, while Pierlot and Spaak, for their part, had proclaimed urbi et orbi that they gave these commitments unlimited scope. Since their proclamation of May 28, in any case, Pierlot and Spaak were personally bound by them.

England, on June 18, 1940, was continuing the fight. Pierlot and Spaak therefore had, if they were logical, if their word meant anything, to remain in solidarity with her.

On June 17, they were at Poitiers. Churchill, sensing that the end of French resistance was near, had placed two aircraft at the disposal of the Belgian statesmen to allow them to take refuge in London. But Pierlot and Spaak saw defeat accelerating. Knowing no criterion other than their ambition and their interest, they had dropped King Leopold when they saw him beaten, in order to attach themselves to the fortune of Paul Reynaud, whom they believed master of the game. On June 17, everything seeming lost to them, they judged it unhealthy to resist any longer and wondered what they would go and do on the other side of the Channel.

There were in their souls neither grand hesitations nor Corneille-like duels. The collapse of Pierlot and Spaak in mid-June 1940 is explained chiefly by the concerns of sedentary and mediocre bourgeois. A member of the Pierlot government, M. De Vleeschauwer, explained his colleagues' attitude thus: "They did not want to cross to England without their entourage, without wives and children, without collaborators; it was even said that there could be no question of going to a country whose language one does not speak, which one does not know."

Very small concerns among the swaggerers who were playing saviors of the fatherland nineteen days earlier. They now sacrificed their logic to questions of brats, pocket dictionaries, and the conjugal bed. No question of Belgium's fate in all that.

How justify this dropping in June when one had so noisily condemned the alleged dropping of the previous month?

"The resolution to continue the struggle beside our guarantors," General Denis explained in an official note, "was frustrated at the time of the conclusion of the Franco-German armistice. The government drew from this fact the conclusion that imposed itself: France's being put out of the case freed it from its obligations."

An untenable thesis. If, as Pierlot had claimed on May 28, Belgium was bound to continue the war beside the Allies, outside her territory, the French capitulation freed her from her obligations only toward France, nothing more. Her obligations toward England remained, quite obviously, entire, and the Denis, Spaak, and Pierlot group were not at all quit of them, despite the "conclusion that imposed itself." Such reasoning was particularly unexpected from the pen of General Denis, since he had on his

conscience a solemn oath he had scarcely had time to utter: "I take in the name of the Army the commitment that it will fight to the end, until final victory, with the will to conquer, whatever happens!"

What happened was that General Denis, although the English continued the war, became, after a month, very tired of galloping with fire at his backside. Then he judged himself "freed" from his obligations and announced, wiping his forehead: "Today, it is no longer a matter of fighting."

And then, these gentlemen of the Belgian government did not know English, and they did not want to "cross to England without their entourage, their wives and children." Consequently, they heroically declared: "the war finished."

One may admit, at a stretch, that the fear of not finding in London the little cares of an attentive wife--armchair by the fire, slippers, herbal tea--may have cooled these heroes' zeal for the fight to the bitter end beside the English and finally induced them to show solidarity with the Belgian people in misfortune. But they had to take that side and then keep silent. For them, the least one can say is that discretion was required.

It is not impossible that Pierlot, left to himself, would have taken refuge in a decent silence. He had "thrown in the sponge" and no doubt would have asked only to hole up until the end of the war in Cugnon, his Ardennes village. But the puppet Pierlot was animated by Spaak. Now Spaak, the string-puller, was going to embark him on a dizzying and incredible adventure. So much so that years and revelations extracted with forceps were needed before people realized the scale of the maneuvers to which these two men devoted themselves, in vain, from June to August 1940, in order to become the friends of the masters of the Third Reich.

A fragment of a sentence from Pierlot's proclamation to Belgian refugees in France, on June 27, 1940, had, from the beginning, intrigued opinion: "We have," said in this appeal the sponge of Bordeaux, "undertaken to enter into relations with the occupying power and with the authorities that have remained in Belgium."

What did Pierlot and Spaak still represent at the end of June 1940? In France, the Pétain government treated them with stinging contempt, refusing them gasoline for their cars, having them received in antechambers by young secretaries or even pushed aside, as importunate persons, by the service staff.

In Belgium, at the same period, what they aroused was more than anger: it was a feeling of violent repulsion. "M. Pierlot," wrote a Catholic minister, "reached the summit of unpopularity, and one may no doubt affirm that, despite the traditional violence of our party struggles, never was a statesman so hated by the great majority of his compatriots."

Hated by the population, vomited up at the Palace of Laeken, what relations could Pierlot possibly have renewed with the "authorities remaining in Belgium"? As for the Germans, it seemed scarcely likely that they would agree to treat the future of Belgium with these depreciated politicians. The public generally believed it to be one last piece of bragging on their part. Besides, Pierlot did not affirm that he was in relations with the "occupying power." No, he had only "undertaken" to enter into relations.

From the moment I left prison, the Janson letter, warmly encouraging Pierre Daye--and me, through Pierre Daye--in the name of the whole Pierlot ministry, to enter into negotiations with the Reich ambassador in Paris, Otto Abetz, had put a flea in my ear. And a few weeks later, in Paris, I had to

admit that they had gone farther than Pierlot's proclamation admitted.

I had formed excellent friendly relations with Pierre Laval and Fernand de Brinon. Both made confidences to me that left me dumbfounded. They had no reason to tell me tall stories. Laval liked me. Brinon was very devoted to me. Both affirmed to me that Pierlot and Spaak--the second pushing the first--were pursuing the Germans in every manner, absolutely wanted to reconcile themselves with them, sign a peace treaty, and were using for this end every imaginable means, including the services of the Vichy government. Laval repeated to me several times that Pierlot and Spaak had gone so far as to press the French Armistice Commission so that it would intervene in their name with the Germans, at Wiesbaden. Laval did not say to what extent Pierlot and Spaak had been accepted or rebuffed. But on the fact itself of their maneuver, he was categorical.

Pierlot and Spaak never opened their mouths on this subject. King Leopold, who knew a great deal about the affair, did not speak either. On both sides, they detested each other. Each of the parties, equally entangled in its contradictions, applied itself to keeping its artillery park intact in anticipation of D-Day.

It was necessary to wait until the trial of Marshal Pétain, in August 1945, for a first public testimony, quite unexpected, to make known one of the attempts made to the Germans with a view to transforming the capitulation of May 28, 1940--so stigmatized by Pierlot--into a complete armistice, which would necessarily have suppressed every link with the British ally. The declaration was made under oath on August 10, 1945--page 301 of the analytical report in the French Journal officiel--by the director of Political Affairs at the Vichy Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ernest Lagarde, and has never been disputed by anyone, neither by Pierlot nor by Spaak. Here is that historical document: "From the beginning of July 1940, the Belgian government, which had taken refuge in the free zone, asked Germany through our intermediary that Belgium pass from the regime of capitulation to the regime of armistice. It was the French delegation at Wiesbaden that was charged with presenting this request. It did not succeed."

One understands that it did not succeed. One understands that the Germans did not take into consideration the offers of service of a "government" dishonored worldwide, without credit with the King and despised by the Belgian people. It is nonetheless incredible to think that for nearly four years Pierlot and Spaak played in London the comedy of Belgians faithful through everything to the noble British allies. They were the purest of the pure, the hardest of the hard, the truest of the true, the last square of the democratic guard. Yet Hitler had not been triumphant on the continent for fifteen days before they were begging the French delegates at Wiesbaden to ask the Reich on their behalf for an agreement that went far beyond what Leopold III had dared and that definitively consecrated the abandonment of the ally of the day before.

Facts are facts. Documents are documents. If the Reich had accepted the request introduced by the French Commission at Wiesbaden, we would have had, from July 1940, a Belgo-German armistice signed not by the "Felon King" of Wynendaele, but by the diehards Pierlot and Spaak in person.

This deposition by Minister Lagarde represents only one testimony. According to what I was told, Pierlot and Spaak had numerous intermediaries with the Germans. Laval had spoken in front of me of certain diplomats and alluded to couriers charged with ultra-secret messages. But these approaches were carried out in an atmosphere deliberately fogged over, so that everything would have remained vague if the fight had not broken out between Leopold III and Spaak. The King, no longer containing himself before the hypocrisy of his former ministers, released in 1947 a first bundle of proofs, each more edifying than the last, of the collaborationist madness that had seized Pierlot and Spaak in 1940,

when both were in search of a new role to play under Hitler's auspices.

From the moment they decided to drop the English, it took Pierlot and Spaak no more than twenty-four hours to begin a policy of rapprochement with Germany. They did not even wait for Pétain's armistice to enter into force.

The Pierlot government was still at Bordeaux, navigating from a gloomy mezzanine on Rue Blanc-Dutrouilh--a truly appropriate fright--to a requisitioned château, Château Labottière--the boot of the Wehrmacht--holding its final sessions among crates, in confusion, hubbub, and "yes-yeses," as one of its members colorfully reports. It was already that day--Hitler's advance guards were still only in the Vienne, the Deux-Sèvres, and the Vendée--that Pierlot and Spaak changed tack.

The first of the documents revealed by the King is dated, in fact, June 19, 1940. Pierlot and Spaak beat all records for speed. From the outset, according to an expression that would assure their glory in the history of the country, they threw in the sponge and advocated the opening of immediate negotiations with the Germans. They clung to the first neutral diplomat they discovered in the whirlpool of the retreat, an Argentine diplomat. They begged him to telegraph his colleague accredited in Switzerland so that the latter would inform King Leopold, through the Belgian minister in Bern, of the pacifist attitude they now intended to adopt. This Pierlot-Spaak telegram, sent on June 19, 1940, says word for word: "The government will resign as soon as the fate of Belgian soldiers in France and Belgian refugees is settled, in order to facilitate probable peace negotiations between Germany and Belgium.

And the Argentine minister specifies: "The government proposes to send one of its ministers to the King so that the latter, with the signature of this minister, may constitute a ministry empowered to open peace negotiations with Germany."

Not even an armistice--peace at once. What haste. On June 19, France is still fighting, England is so resolved to continue the fight that she has just sent the Belgian government in France two aircraft for transport to London, and in addition offers it twenty-five places on an Admiralty ship. But the war is, for Pierlot and Spaak, so "finished," liquidated, cleaned up, that they are ready to side without further delay with the Reich.

On June 19, however, Pierlot and Spaak still show a certain restraint. Not as regards the Germans: with them they propose outright negotiations for a separate peace, all allies tossed overboard. They are modest in regard to their personal ambitions, for they admit that it is another royal government that could make peace. They sacrifice themselves; they offer their resignation.

That is only a first impulse. They very quickly recover themselves. They feel indispensable.

Scarcely have they set the Argentines in motion when they also rush upon the Nuncio. This is to ask him too to send a telegram to King Leopold, urging him to a reconciliation with the Germans, which they themselves could successfully carry out, they clearly suggest.

The Pierlot-Spaak text, telegraphed to King Leopold by the Apostolic Nuncio in France via Bern--Belgian ambassador Count d'Ursel--says without detour: "The hour has perhaps also come for Belgium to begin talks with Germany with a view to concluding an armistice. The Belgian government is ready to negotiate with the German government on this subject."

Already seeking to profit from this occasion to reappear before the Sovereign, Pierlot and Spaak add:

"It [the government] believes, however, that it is useful, in the higher interest of the country, to make contact with the King." What marvelous hypocrisy. And what a fine double stroke: to be accepted by the Germans and to reintroduce themselves to the King--this after the outpourings of filth on May 28 and 31. "The higher interest of the country" has broad shoulders.

The maneuver is going to become more precise. Spaak--the French armistice is not yet effective--wants more and more impatiently to "negotiate the conditions of an armistice between Germany and Belgium." For this, he needs--he still admits it--the King's agreement. To obtain that agreement, it would be necessary to go to Brussels, and therefore to obtain from the Germans, who are still officially at war with France, passports. Hence this letter from Spaak, on June 24, 1940, to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Baudoin: "As soon as the armistice has become effective between France and Germany, I would be grateful if you would make known to the German government that the Belgian government desires to enter into contact with it in order to negotiate, within the framework of the conditions of the Franco-German armistice, the questions concerning Belgian officers, soldiers, and civilians located in France.

"The Belgian government is also ready to negotiate the conditions of an armistice between Germany and Belgium, but before committing itself to this path, it considers it indispensable to make contact with the King and requests, for this purpose, a safe-conduct for two of its members."

On June 26, 1940--therefore only one week after the telegrams of the Nuncio and the Argentine diplomat--our two drowned men have already recovered their swagger. Pierlot risks, this time, writing directly to the head of the King's Cabinet.

The brother of my old friend Paul Berryer will be charged with carrying the Government's message to Brussels. The proposal to come to terms with the Germans is still just as clear. But the offer of resignation, launched by Pierlot in the Argentine telegram, has, in eight days, lost a great deal of its vigor: it is now wrapped in circumlocutions. Pierlot asks for a reprieve under cover of the most edifying pretexts: "We think," Pierlot writes, "that there are two urgent things to do: 1. Negotiate with the Germans the return of Belgians, soldiers and civilians, located in France.

"2. Negotiate with the Germans the conditions of an armistice or convention concerning Belgium.

"On this last point, knowing the situation poorly, we do not wish to do anything without knowing the King's opinion.

"If the King believes that it is useful and possible to form a new government, we are naturally ready to offer our resignation. We believe, however, that it would be useful to act in such a way that a Belgian authority may be exercised in France until the problem of the soldiers, civil servants, and refugees is settled."

As palinode, one cannot do better. As for the refugee problem, that is a find. Love of the portfolio makes a man ingenious.

Nevertheless, on June 26, 1940, Spaak and Pierlot do not yet imagine that they are capable of taking back the levers of command and that it is possible for them to enter into contact with the Germans without the King's agreement and support. Therefore, at least in the first days, they make themselves very mild.

On June 19, then, the King is informed by the Nuncio that "the Belgian government is ready to negotiate with the German government." On June 24, Spaak requests German visas in order to go see the King in Brussels. On June 26, after renewing his proposal to negotiate "urgently" with the Germans, Pierlot repeats: "We do not wish to do anything without knowing the King's opinion."

But the King's answer is slow in coming. In the meantime, Pierlot and Spaak have recovered their courage. They fear, with reason, that Leopold III will oppose their return to Affairs. Can they decently think that their exploits of May 28 will be forgotten? Even if they put themselves into the skin of vile flatterers, even if they succeed in making themselves completely flat...

And ambition continues to work upon them. Spaak does not want to sink. The Germans have won; he wants to come to terms with the Germans. The King, over there, is playing dead? They will do without the King, as on May 28. They will address themselves directly to the Germans. We are there at the end of two weeks.

And it is Pierlot's incredible proposal to the Belgian ambassador in Berlin, Viscount Davignon, that is recorded in the report below: "On July 3," writes Viscount Davignon, "M. Pierlot telegraphed me to ask me to come see him urgently at the Hôtel Albert Ier, in Vichy. M. Pierlot showed himself especially amiable toward me. He told me that the Government's efforts to enter into contact with the Reich had failed up to that moment. These efforts, for the purpose of concluding an armistice, had been attempted via the Spanish ambassador accredited in France and via the French government, which had promised to transmit the Belgian request to the Armistice Commission at Wiesbaden.

"M. Pierlot asked me to leave for Switzerland in order to enter into contact with the German minister in Bern and to open, by that route, armistice negotiations with the Reich. M. Pierlot showed himself particularly insistent. During the conversation, M. Soudan entered and added his urgings to those of M. Pierlot. My interlocutors said several times that the Government's situation had become untenable."

Ambassador Davignon had no desire to launch himself into such approaches, especially without the King's knowledge. He tried to get out of it without too much damage: "I answered M. Pierlot," he adds in his report, "that I did not see clearly in whose name I would speak to the Germans. There was no doubt for me that the Reich would refuse to recognize the existence of the Belgian government in exile; from then on, if I came on its behalf, I risked having the door shut in my face. I added that I did not see clearly in the situation."

Opportunely, M. Davignon was recalled to Brussels by King Leopold, so that there was no longer any question for him of lending himself to the maneuvers of MM. Pierlot and Spaak. He was relieved.

Another request presented to the Germans by the Spanish ambassador in France, M. Félix de Lequerica, was also rejected by the Reich, just as the request presented by the French to the Wiesbaden Commission was rejected, in humiliating fashion.

All this is rather pitiful. Personally, I have no doubt about the true reasons animating Pierlot and Spaak. But one could admit other reasons, imagine that our two men had been illuminated by a late grace and that they finally conceived the necessity of establishing a modus vivendi with Hitler's Germany.

From the moment they had made known to Leopold III "that they did not wish to do anything without knowing his opinion," it seems that decency would have commanded them to wait for that opinion. What, then, does this feverish agitation mean, and why do they not give the King the material time to

answer them?

The height of it was the casualness with which Pierlot and Spaak passed over the King's answer when it was communicated to them.

Leopold III's opinion, transmitted in the form of a verbal communication, was negative. The King did not deign to allude to the armistice proposal--he obviously had, for possible discussions with the Reich, a little more prestige than the two wrecks of May 28. The answer from Laeken had the dryness that suited it. The King refused to receive an emissary from Pierlot. He added that he saw no reason for the Pierlot team to continue exercising functions in France under the pretext of attending to the repatriation of refugees--the Red Cross had taken this task in hand. Finally, the King made known to Pierlot and his teammates that they were not to set foot in Belgium again for the time being.

Here is the full text of this notification, dictated in Brussels on July 4, 1940, and delivered by Viscount Berryer to Pierlot, in Vichy, six days later: "The King's situation has not changed. The King performs no political acts and receives no politicians. The Red Cross is attending to the repatriation of Belgians from France. Personally, M. Frédéricq considers that it is not indicated that MM. Pierlot and associates return to Belgium at present."

They speak of "MM. Pierlot and associates." There is no longer any "Pierlot government."

This curt refusal, instead of disarming Spaak and Pierlot, only excites them further. The Sovereign does not want them? They will impose themselves upon him by making themselves indispensable.

How impose themselves upon him, despite him, except by playing the German card to the hilt? In that way they would again assert themselves, as the Belgian government, in official debates concerning an armistice treaty. Recognized by Hitler, the King would have to recognize them too, willingly or not.

Once regarded by Ribbentrop as Belgian ministers in office, they would have returned to Brussels with their prerogatives. King Leopold would have found himself in a very embarrassing situation. The consequences for his own prestige and for the unity of the country would have been frightful. And yet that is what Pierlot and Spaak wanted to bring about.

Parallel to these disorderly approaches, they did everything possible to win the Germans' good graces.

Who obliged them to send back post-haste to Belgium, to work there for German war production, our compatriots who had taken refuge in the unoccupied zone? It is that they were counting, by furnishing them so appreciable a contribution, on German gratitude.

The same incredible zeal appears concerning the Belgian army. The Pierlot government did not content itself with observing that the war was "finished" and that "it was no longer a matter of fighting." It did not content itself with officially demobilizing the Belgian troops who had taken refuge in France, but sent them back to the German military authorities, filling the Reich's Oflags and Stalags with officers and non-commissioned officers of the active army, who had until then remained free. At the same period, it gorged the German depots with magnificent matériel. Extraordinary "resisters," who, under the noses of the English "allies," liquidated the surviving forces of the Belgian army and delivered them wholesale to Hitler, along with the war matériel that had until then escaped the Wehrmacht.

The Pierlot government was ready to deliver everything; it was ready to accept everything. One cannot

help, even now, blushing with shame when rereading the incredible remarks that Pierlot and Spaak had repeated to the Belgians of France in July 1940, in order to give them the mentality of the defeated.

Here is the communication that the first vice-president of the Senate, Leyniers, came to address, in the name of the Government, to Belgian parliamentarians meeting in session at Limoges, at the moment when--July 8, 1940--Pierlot and Spaak, without the King's agreement, were harassing the German government with their offers of service: "From the legal point of view, M. Pierlot and his colleagues told us they could give us not the slightest information.

"They think that the Belgians must begin to adapt themselves to a new mentality, which is that of a defeated country, for we are defeated.

"The measures we have proposed to take," M. Pierlot told me, "will not depend on us, but on the French government and the German government. Now the latter is in no hurry at all to act...

"As for Belgium's future, the Government does not know what the peace treaty will be. The most favorable would be for Belgium to continue with relative independence, included in a Zollverein having at its head a Gauleiter...

"Once again, the Government begs you to put firmly into your heads that we are defeated and that we must adapt ourselves to this situation."

Pierlot could not contest the authenticity of these frightful words. He was obliged, in January 1948, to recognize this: "That M. Leyniers, in conversations with ministers, heard a reflection of this kind, I do not doubt, since he declares it."

Thus, for a Pierlot and a Spaak, the "most favorable" hypothesis was that Belgium should have at its head a Gauleiter. They undertook to negotiate with the Germans while repeating to themselves: "We are defeated; we must adapt ourselves to this situation of the defeated."

The unheard-of thing is that, when no one wished to treat with them, come to an understanding with them, grant them the slightest credit--the Germans themselves manifested the disgust they inspired in them--the unheard-of thing is that these needy men of collaboration were able, after their failure, nevertheless to pass to London and return to the country in 1944 as paragons of Belgian independence, Belgian liberation, Belgian honor, and Belgian patriotism. The unheard-of thing is that on their return they had the nerve to organize the most gigantic manhunt ever seen in Belgium, having six hundred fifty-nine thousand presumed "collaborators" hunted by their unleashed "justice," having approximately one hundred thousand of these unfortunates incarcerated under frightful conditions, making rain down upon the country--a rain of tears and blood--more than six thousand death sentences and hundreds of thousands of years in prison. This repression was of horrible savagery: unfortunate old men, illustrious scholars, dying in dungeons, struck down by ill-treatment and hunger; young girls raped ten times, twenty times, thirty times by "patriots" and finally left for dead on the floors of their cells; mothers of volunteers of the Eastern Front delivered as prey to hordes of liberated Mongol prisoners; poor innocent children whose fathers were "collaborators" sent into penitentiaries for criminal or precociously tainted children.

What had all these unfortunate men and all these unfortunate women, victims of the Pierlots and Spaaks, done? Which one of them, man or woman, had ever spoken of a Gauleiter in Belgium?

It was not of a bastard Belgium, reduced to being only a portion of a Zollverein, that we dreamed, but of the resurrected Great Netherlands, such as our fathers had known them in the most glorious days of the fatherland. From misfortune, we wanted not a diminished fatherland to spring forth, but an enlarged fatherland, having recovered its sumptuous Burgundian breadth, collaborating with the other peoples in equality and pride, within a Germanic Federation in the style of Charles V, of which we would be, imperially, the very rich ocean gate. That is what collaboration in a united and reconciled Europe meant for us, Belgian nationalists. It is for that ideal that we fought without respite; it is for it that thousands of our comrades died as heroes on the anti-Soviet front and under the bullets of assassins.

Yet it is this ideal that was represented in 1944 as the lowest of crimes. And by whom? By these Pierlots and these Spaaks who, in July 1940, begged the Germans to allow them to sign a peace treaty which, in the most favorable hypothesis, would have reduced Belgium to being only part of a Zollverein, under the rod of a Gauleiter. Tragic farce. Gigantic swindle. They, climbed back into power after all their denials, were troubled by no one. Spaak, great man of Belgium at the U.N., became Prime Minister. Pierlot, the sinister Pierlot, was ennobled by the Regent--the brother, the rival, the bitter enemy of Leopold III. But hundreds of idealists were savagely shot. But tens and tens of thousands of others knew inhuman prisons. But nearly half a million Belgians were branded with the red-hot iron of "incivism."

If Hitler had been the Machiavelli people have said, he would have cynically exploited the repeated offers of the Pierlot government; he would have compromised Pierlot and Spaak forever; he would have pushed these rebel ministers forward, thereby weakened Leopold III, then the moral cement of the Belgians, and, in the end, absorbed a Belgium covered in mud and dislocated by its dissensions.

Hitler had only one word to say. Pierlot and Spaak would have rushed to Wiesbaden and Berchtesgaden. Who would deny it? Ten decisive documents establish it. If Spaak and Pierlot, potential "collaborators," did not become collaborators in fact, it was solely because Hitler did not want their collaboration. The German Military Command even had to resolve, in order to rid itself of these importunate men, to issue on July 18, 1940, the following secret order: "The Pierlot government has repeatedly addressed itself to the German government in order to open negotiations concerning the return of refugees and official armistice negotiations. The Führer's point of view is that there is no Belgian government. Any request emanating from Belgian authorities to enter into relations with us must be rejected."

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XVIII

LONDON FOR WANT OF BERLIN

For a separate peace with the Reich. - Spaak and de Man. - The picturesque Albert De Vleeschauwer. - His adventure with Churchill. - Catapulted to the Pyrenees! - Pierlot and Spaak at the bottom of disaster. - Rescue offered by Vleeschauwer at Le Perthus. - Gutt joins his own people. - Pierlot and Spaak's false promise to go to London. - Their new maneuvers in Brussels and their "cessation of functions." - German reply: decree of banishment. - Londoners for want of being Berliners. - Leopold III's definitive opposition to "Messrs. Pierlot and consorts." - Praise of impossible characters. - Spaak, Spaakist. - The immorality of crowds.

From the second half of July 1940 onward, the Pierlot government was down. On June 18 it had "thrown in the sponge," dropped the English, and repudiated the solemn commitments it had made toward them on May 28. More exactly, it had changed camps, burning to be reconciled with the King, whom it had repudiated a month earlier, and with the Germans whom it had sworn to drive back to the Oder with a sword in their kidneys.

But this about-face had brought it nothing. Argentine, Spanish, and French diplomats, monsignori from Bern and Vichy, had not been able to persuade Hitler to admit this old goat Pierlot into his sheepfold, however repentant he might be, however ready he might be to bow before a Gauleiter.

Pierlot and Spaak thought they could thereby impose themselves indirectly on King Leopold. Since Germany had not agreed to deal with them, all that remained was to attempt a direct rapprochement with Leopold III, in the hope that he would consent to clear them with the Germans, who were insensible to their offers.

Anyone else, after so many rebuffs, would have tired of it. Pierlot and Spaak did not. They wanted their maneuver to succeed, and from mid-July to mid-August 1940 the two of them were seen transformed into gentle, respectful, and devoted servants of His Majesty. On July 21, 1940, Pierlot made a honeyed speech over Radio Vichy in which he spread himself like a doormat at the Monarch's feet. Barely seven weeks had passed since the famous meeting at Limoges, during which the "legal and moral impossibility for Leopold III to reign" had been proclaimed!

And Paul-Henri Spaak, desperate, frantically chasing after all the "fascists" he knew in Europe, had had to write from Vichy, on July 10, to Eduardo Aunos, the former ambassador in Brussels of the "dictator" Franco, these wailing lines: "We have tried to enter into contact with Germany, first through the Nuncio, then through an emissary. Our efforts have failed. The German government, as I expected, completely ignores us. For it we do not exist."

Once this stage had been passed, Pierlot and Spaak let nothing stop them. They overwhelmed the King and his collaborators with pleas, interventions, and messages. The King, they wrote, should negotiate an armistice, even a peace treaty, with the Reich. A separate peace with Hitler!

Who was proposing this separate peace? Who proposed it in writing? Degrelle? De Man? Staf De Clercq? Not at all: it was Spaak and Pierlot!

Until then Pierlot and Spaak still considered themselves, not without reason, ministers in office. A peace treaty with the Reich would have had to be signed by them. That is why this act interested them to such a degree. The diplomatic child born in this way would have proved the reconciliation of the parents. For the King, since the note of July 4, they were simply "Messrs. Pierlot and consorts."

To all their approaches Leopold III invariably opposed the same refusal. He had all the emissaries of the Pierlot "government" turned away, even Minister Delfosse. Not one line of reply was sent from Laeken to Vichy, even if it had been signed by the most obscure chargé de mission.

On the Belgian side, Spaak saw only one chance of political survival for himself. He saw it in the help that Henri de Man, his former colleague in the Government and in the P.B.O., might bring him. One really had to be prepared for anything to resort to such an intercessor. De Man had just liquidated Spaak's own party, the Socialist Party, in five seconds flat. At the moment when Spaak was exhausting

his lungs at Limoges preaching war to the bitter end, de Man had gone over bag and baggage to National Socialism, proclaiming that Hitler's victory was nothing less than a "deliverance." Moreover, de Man was publicly mocking Spaak before the eyes and with the knowledge of all Belgium. At Vichy, no minister of the Pierlot team was unaware of it.

But political passion possesses Spaak body and soul. His ambition--let us be kind and say his vocation--alone commands his actions. Spaak therefore set off in pursuit of Henri de Man to have him open for him that door of Laeken which he had not been able to force. He begged his former crony to get him out of trouble. He asked him to request the King's forgiveness in his name. He charged his wife, who had remained in Brussels, to intervene personally with Henri de Man: "Go and see de Man," he wrote to her literally, "he has always had sympathy for you!" These letters from good fat Spaak to Mme Spaak were very funny. I understand perfectly that Spaak, remembering these crooked messages in particular, did the impossible to prevent de Man from being extradited from Switzerland. The latter could have defended himself tooth and nail.

Despite all the sympathy de Man felt for Mme Spaak--according to the husband, at least--the wrecker of the Socialist Party turned a deaf ear, laughed, pulled at his short pipe, and abstained from any intervention.

Everything seemed definitively lost for Spaak and Pierlot, when an unforeseen possibility was suddenly offered to them, the very same one they had fiercely rejected a month and a half earlier. Churchill, who could not choose his means in the desperate situation in which England found itself, forgot their very recent betrayal and once more held out a pole to them.

On June 17, 1940, when Pierlot and Spaak arrived in Bordeaux, one Belgian minister had already been there for several days: the Minister of Colonies, a sympathetic crackpot named Albert De Vleeschauwer.

I had known this brave Vleeschauwer, Vleesch--meat, in Flemish--as we called him, for a long time. Vleesch was a man of the Boerenbond, Cardinal Van Roey's great Catholic politico-financial agricultural machine. Since this body largely financed the Flemish section of the University of Louvain, Vleesch had been made professor there. They also made him a deputy. He was a picturesque fellow, ugly as a clown, with baggy eyes, his hair always standing straight up; Jam drew marvelous and appalling caricatures of him. But he was a good sort, a little "zoot," uncomplicated, affable, cheerful.

In 1936, at the time of the great Rex campaigns, when each week I demolished a compromised politician, Vleesch had felt the heat. Not that he was corrupt. But he had had vehement troubles with an interior decorator from the rue de Bruxelles in Louvain. The fellow had discovered, in a night table beside the conjugal bed, letters in which brave Vleesch revealed, in addition to quite unexpected lyrical gifts, certain details which it would have been better, for the general peace, to leave in shadow. Vleesch, to whom, it seems, the recovery of the original texts had cost rather dearly, had feared that the outraged husband might hand over to me unfortunate photographs, not bought back, alas, of this romantic-realist literature. Quite astonishing scenes, provoked by the heroine, took place in my office. But these little stories had nothing to do with politics, and I did not concern myself with the poetic relaxations of others. I was greatly amused listening to the details of the adventure. But I let good Vleesch digest his stormy memories in peace.

Meanwhile, like everyone else, Vleesch had become a minister. An improbable minister, rigged out in suits stiff as sacks, with a celluloid collar and a tie hooked on like a sock drying. In the June 1940

hubbub, he had arrived first in Bordeaux. As Minister of Colonies, he considered that he still had his little role to play, despite the débâcle. A Fleming, with the French in his nose, the mere idea of moldering in France gave him jaundice. He tried to obtain a special fate for his department. He was told, in his own words, "that there could be no exception, that the Minister of Colonies had to share the same fate as the other ministers," that is, to "throw in the sponge," like the French.

Crafty, taking advantage on June 19 of the disorder in which the last meeting of the Belgian government at Bordeaux was held, he had drafted two letters, to be signed by Pierlot, appointing him administrator-general of the Congo, with authorization to reside in England or America.

It was a way of slipping off. The two letters were read. No one paid the slightest attention to their contents, so great was the agitation among all these people: "Most of them," Vleesch recounted, "were standing in the large room. Were they listening or were they not listening? In any case, there were yes-yeses and no one objected."

In fact, no one had listened. Vleesch himself reports it not without humor: "When, later, I invoked these letters to prove that we had continued the struggle without interruption, one of my colleagues--who had joined me in London--remarked to me: You left in equivocation."

Prudent, our Vleesch had retreated not to London but to Spain, then to Portugal. Time passed. In July, he decided to go and have a look at the City. There Churchill, like Diogenes, was looking for a man. They brought him Vleesch, trousers like an accordion, collar like a lampshade, hair catching the chandeliers. But the man, despite his dazed look, seemed useful. In London at that moment they were hiring anyone. So they shipped him aboard the British galley and charged him with recruiting some of the Belgian ministers who were wandering about France from hotel to hotel.

Vleesch made all the commitments Churchill wanted. It cost him nothing, not even a stroke of the comb. In London, in July 1940, while he was launching himself into such light promises, he scarcely suspected that Pierlot and Spaak were begging the Reich authorities, by every imaginable route, to conclude an armistice with them, even peace itself!

One fine morning came the roof tile: a telegram from Pierlot ordered Vleesch, without explanation, to rally at once to the Belgian government in Vichy. Pierlot was not coming to London; it was Vleesch who had to go and join in France the colleagues who, on June 18, had abandoned the English.

Churchill's police had made a copy of the telegram as it passed. Poor Vleesch was given a dressing-down by Churchill, ordered to carry out his promise, and catapulted onto the Iberian peninsula to try, cost what it might, to bring to England these Pierlots and Spaaks then hanging on to Ribbentrop's coat tails.

Vleesch had sent them from London a report on the English offers. No reply. Arrived in Lisbon, he bombarded the Pierlot government with telegrams. Still no reply. Vleesch risked going as far as Madrid and began the telegraphic performance again. Still no reply. "From the Belgian government at Vichy," Vleeschauwer ingenuously recounted in his memoirs, "I received no answer to my cries of anguish. They did receive my telegrams, however: a ministerial colleague told me one day on this subject: Your telegrams, my dear fellow, we did not even read them any more!"

What Pierlot did have offered to him, by the French Legation in Lisbon and then by the French Embassy in Madrid, was a visa to go to Vichy. Vleesch, already quite dazed by nature, was still more so

on receiving from Pierlot this acknowledgment of receipt, strange as it was indirect. He at once smelled the trap. "What did it mean," he asks in his tasty Memoirs, written in pidgin, no doubt in memory of his passage through the Ministry of Colonies, "what did this French visa mean, thrown at my head in this way? Late collaboration by the French government in the order that had been given to me to rejoin the Belgian government at Vichy? An attempt to draw me into France, my arrival in London having already provoked reactions in the enemy camp? Everything was possible then." In short, Vleesch already saw himself sequestered at Vichy, he the Londoner!

In a message which he sent from Madrid on July 28, 1940, to King Leopold at Laeken, he complained very bitterly of the Pierlot government, "which I prefer not to judge," he added with a pretty toss of the wig.

He had indeed promised Churchill to bring him some of these recalcitrant ministers. But he feared, in going to France, being kidnapped by them. So he confined himself to sending a telegram making an appointment with Pierlot, Spaak, and Gutt at the Grand Hôtel of Perpignan, while taking care not to go there himself. His account is truly priceless: "I delegated to my appointment at Perpignan our consul in Barcelona, M. Jottard, and M. Querin, attaché to our embassy in Madrid: they found no one at the appointment. And I had to succeed! I sent the same two officials back again with the mission of entering, cost what it might, into telephone contact with M. Pierlot to tell him: 'Albert absolutely must meet you, you, Paul-Henri, and Camille.'"

"Paul-Henri," "Camille," and "Hubert," at that moment, and without "Albert" suspecting it, were struggling in the very bottom of the net of their subterfuges. If this call from Perpignan had been made three weeks earlier, it would have been rejected without discussion: Pierlot and Spaak's great Argentine-Hispano-Franco-Vatican-Swiss collaborationist maneuver was then in full development. Pierlot and Spaak were so convinced that their offers would be accepted that they had had prepared, for the Reich's emissaries, the magnificent Belgian ship of the Antwerp-Congo line, the Baudoinville, anchored in the Gironde downstream from Bordeaux. One of the ministers of the Pierlot cabinet, Balthazar, in 1947 recounted how the salon of the Baudoinville was put in order to receive the Germans. One of the crew members, for his part, gave scandalous details about the adventure, describing "the officers in full dress uniform on deck," relating the actions of the ministers eager for an embrace with the Nazis: "Personally, as steward, serving these gentlemen at table, I heard their conversations in spite of myself. I saw them at work and gathered the echoes of their noisy remarks.

"I can assure you that their vocabulary was not always very choice. I even witnessed the order given to one of my colleagues to make disappear the bust of the King which was in the great salon. But the bust was solidly fastened and the man had to knock it down with hammer blows; the pieces were thrown into the water."

But the Germans sent no emissary and, the steward adds, "as suddenly as they had come, the ministers disappeared in every direction."

For the Pierlot government, the situation had only grown worse. The Germans were not reacting to the offers transmitted to them. King Leopold, pursued ten times, refused to tow Spaak and Pierlot into German waters.

Finally, disaster of disasters, the Bank of France was henceforth refusing to pay the checks issued by the Pierlot government. I myself had crossed Vichy without accepting an interview with these drifting men, without replying to their congratulations.

Vleeschauwer's proposal arrived exactly at the moment when the rout was being consummated. Pierlot and Spaak had nothing more to hope for, either on the German side or on the King's side. The French authorities had grown snarling, treating the Belgian ministers with hauteur, ill will, even contempt. Their life was being made impossible. They were emptied out, piteous, penniless. And now, miraculously, this crackpot Vleesch fell from the moon with a solution.

Of course, it seemed a little difficult to carry out after everything that had happened since June 18. What remained for them was the hope that London was badly informed, and that was the case. De Vleeschauwer himself knew almost nothing about the offers made to the Germans. And then, what else could they do but try this last chance?

General Tilkens, in his report to the King in August 1940, thus depicted the ministers' state of mind, according to their last emissary, General Hannecart: "The ministers hesitate: Soudan is ill, De Schrijver indifferent, Janson without any spring, Spaak fears for his family which is in Belgium, Pierlot will go to London if he obtains a guarantee for his family of eight children."

As one sees, it was not a matter of guarantees for Belgium, but guarantees concerning the welcome reserved for the little Pierlot ostriches. They were not discussing "resistance," but home, nursery, and mess.

Haunted by these highly national concerns, "Hubert" decided to go with "Paul-Henri" and "Camille" to "Albert's" invitation. On August 2 they were at the Spanish frontier, where they held a long caucus in the hut of the French customs men at Le Perthus. Vleesch, voluble and very excited, offered mountains and marvels. Pierlot and Spaak weighed the pros and cons for a long time.

Gutt decided first. He is an Israelite. The name he uses is a half-name: in reality he was born Guttenstein and not Gutt. For him, no chance remained of keeping afloat in the antisemitic Europe of 1940. The Allied clan was the clan of his race. Resistance was the resistance of his race. The Jews, in any case, could not lose more than they had already lost. To resist, for them, was perhaps to save the future. Perhaps one day Jewish America would set itself in motion. That might cost Europe its life. And then? They are not of Europe. They are from nowhere. Without the Jews, there would have been no resistance in 1940.

There were, certainly, non-Jewish resisters, especially after some time. But they were the dupes of the adventure, as always in associations with Israel. It is an old story, the eternal story. For Guttenstein, the case was clear. He crossed the Rubicon of Le Perthus on August 2, 1940, going to join those of his race.

Pierlot and Spaak could have done the same that afternoon. They were careful not to. They contented themselves with promising, with tremolos, to the bustling "Albert" that they would join him in London very soon. It was certain, decided, settled! The other, his plume standing up like the Pyrenean peaks, left again in wonder, flanked by his arch-rabbi.

But Pierlot and Spaak's promises were worth no more on August 2, 1940, than on other dates. They had said yes, but they thought neither yes nor no, not having finished weighing the advantages and disadvantages, comparing, going from counter to counter. For these anxious bargainers, politics, the fatherland, the universe, were nothing but a dark souk where their ambition hesitated before the barter. They had pretended to rally to the offers of Churchill's scout. They had verbally agreed to go to the United Kingdom. It was one more deception. They had kept that chance in reserve, nothing more. They

would use it if they really saw that there was nothing else left to try.

While Vleesch, proud as if he had shot the popinjay, was announcing to Churchill their coming arrival in London, Pierlot and Spaak were considering a completely different operation. Their aim was to return to Belgium at all costs--on tiptoe, since they could do no otherwise. They had just decided for good to offer the King their resignation from their portfolios.

On August 2 they promised Vleesch they would come to England. Time to pack their bags, and they would be there! But on August 20, having reached the height of indecision, they informed Leopold III that they were liquidating their team and ceasing to exercise their governmental functions.

They delegated General Hannecart to the Palace of Laeken; he transmitted the ministers' renunciation to General Tilkens, head of the King's Military Household. This decision was recorded at once. Count Capelle, questioned by Belgian justice in 1946 about the conversations he had had by order of the Sovereign in 1940 with various "collaborators," summarized in these terms the last act of the Belgian government of Vichy: "It is exact that I expressed the opinion that the war was finished and that the Pierlot government no longer existed. If I said that, it is because of the attitude adopted by the Pierlot government which--by dispatches, letters, and messages sent to the Château of Laeken during the summer of 1940--had urged the King to enter into relations with Germany with a view to peace or armistice negotiations, and because on August 20, 1940, the Government had informed the head of the King's Military Household, through M. Hannecart, that it was ceasing to exercise its functions."

Eight days later, the Belgian commissioners in France received from the resigning ministers a letter of thanks which began thus: "At the moment of the cessation of their functions, the undersigned ministers wish to express to you all the gratitude of the Government."

It was formally established, during the Romsée trial in 1948, that Pierlot himself had signed this letter. For a long time he had tried to deny this capital act. This resignation took place, moreover, in appalling confusion. It was never possible to know who exactly had resigned, nor how, nor when. Years later, the ministers of 1940 were still publicly quarreling about the matter. The curtain fell on this tragic farce, with its acts so varied.

At least Pierlot, Spaak, and the others had told themselves that once this liquidation was accomplished, nothing more would prevent them, now simple refugees, from returning to their homes. Informed of their unpopularity in Belgium, they were quite determined to make themselves discreet, to be patient, silent, invisible, bent toward oblivion--a little door half-open on the future.

This last dream collapsed, for the Reich government had just issued a decree of banishment against all the members of the Pierlot team. This last blow of fate was needed before they finally made up their minds. There was nothing left for them but to leave. They still hesitated over the direction to take, for they did not strongly believe in England's chances. Pierlot and Spaak thought of moving to the United States rather than settling in Churchill's country: "Messrs. Pierlot and Spaak," their colleague of the time, Minister Balthazar, declared, "announced that they were going to America in order to occupy themselves with supplying the Belgian population."

And indeed, before entering Spain, asked by the French authorities to "give their word of honor not to go to England," Pierlot and Spaak each signed the following declaration: "I, the undersigned, formally declare that I am asking the French government for an exit visa from France in order to go to New York, to organize a committee analogous to the Hoover Committee."

Pierlot was no more than a wreck. As he stated rather comically to the Belgian Chamber on September 19, 1944, evoking the cascade of his palinodes: "All men, no doubt, with few exceptions, who have lived through these events otherwise than as spectators, have reached and touched their own limits. Such an experience is always a subject for modesty."

"Modesty" which did not prevent him, at the moment of that admission, from hunting down more than five hundred thousand Belgians and having thousands of them condemned to death, in order to punish them for a "collaborationism" which he would have carried to its zenith, with Zollverein and Gauleiter, if Hitler had only been willing, in July 1940, to accept his prayers and offers!

In this whole story, what were the King's reactions? For a long time people believed they had been absolutely clear: a categorical refusal to have the slightest contact with the figures who had so appallingly vilified him on May 28, 1940, before the face of the universe.

In 1945, when the King was liberated in Austria by the Americans, his return was torpedoed cleanly by the decision he made known not to deal with any government of which Spaak and Pierlot would be members, unless the latter first withdrew their calumnies of 1940. Spaak preferred to plunge Belgium into chaos for years rather than submit to such a condition.

Pierlot and Spaak had known this royal veto since they had returned to Brussels, behind the Allied armor, in September 1944. They then ran up against an extremely stiff royal text.

"We had barely reached Brussels," Minister Balthazar recounted, "when we became aware of a writing left by the King, in which he demanded public reparation from the four ministers of Wynendaele and those who had slandered him at Limoges."

The Pierlot government tried to smother this writing, but in vain, for the Grand Marshal of the Court had taken care to communicate a copy of it, that very day, to Marshal Montgomery. The King said: "There is no patriot who is not tormented by the memory of certain speeches pronounced before the tribune of the whole world, by which Belgian ministers permitted themselves, at exceptionally critical hours, when the safeguarding of national dignity imposed a certain circumspection, to utter hastily imputations of the highest gravity against the conduct of our army and the acts of its chief.

"These accusations, which in stubborn blindness attacked the honor of our soldiers and their commander-in-chief, have caused Belgium incalculable and difficult-to-repair harm.

"One would search history in vain for a similar example of a government gratuitously casting opprobrium upon its Sovereign and upon the national flag.

"The prestige of the Crown and the honor of the country are opposed to the authors of these speeches exercising any authority whatsoever in liberated Belgium so long as they have not repudiated their error and made solemn and complete reparation.

"The nation would not understand that the dynasty should agree to associate with its action men who inflicted upon it an affront at which the whole world looked on in stupefaction."

The four years of war had therefore preserved all the bitterness of the conflict. And yet--the secret was kept for a long time--the King, just like his ministers, had in 1940 executed two stupefying turns of

coat.

On May 25, 1940, at Wynendaele, Leopold had broken with the four members of the Government. Let us recall the essentials of the dramatic dialogue: PIERLOT: Will the King have a government in Belgium? THE KING: Yes, I am not a dictator. PIERLOT: In the King's thought, can this government not be the present government?

THE KING: It appears that the occupier would not consent to it. PIERLOT: Should we resign? THE KING: This derision would be in the logic of the situation. SPAAK: If the present government continues the war alongside the Allies, will this government still be the King's government?

THE KING: No, this government will necessarily be against me." The disagreement had been so sharp that once the ministers had fled to France, Leopold III strongly regretted not simply revoking them outright. He tried to repair this omission. Spaak, in his speech at Limoges on May 31, 1940, gave curious details on this last-minute initiative of Leopold III: "I must, however, tell you of one further incident which occurred and which came to give concrete form to our fears. On Sunday the 26th in the evening, the King had telephoned to ask that a minister agree to sign two blank decrees, one pronouncing the dismissal of the Government, the other appointing new ministers. Need I tell you that among the thirteen ministers present, not one consented to lend himself to this maneuver?"

Henri de Man revealed the details of this strange operation. On May 24 already, the eve of the famous interview at Wynendaele, the King had asked de Man whether he would be ready to assume ministerial responsibilities "in case there should be no ministers in office to take them." De Man had replied affirmatively. On the 26th, de Man had another conversation with Leopold III concerning the formation of a government intended to replace the Pierlot-Spaak team. The former socialist minister thus summarized his dialogue with the Sovereign: "I would like," the King said to me, "in case of necessity and in order to be able to resolve certain questions connected with the capitulation, for you to agree to become minister again, perhaps with one or two other personalities.

"I declared myself ready to do so and suggested that, to mark clearly the occasional and transitional character of the measure, the other ministers should also be taken from the army, among men who were, so to speak, within the King's hand; I cited as examples the names of General Tilkens and Auditor Hayoit de Termirourt. R.L.1 agreed but remarked that, before all else, in conformity with Hayoit's conclusions, it was necessary to obtain the agreement of at least one minister in office for the required countersignature.2 He charged me with doing what was necessary to that effect by telephoning the embassy in London.

1 R.L.: abbreviation used by de Man in his notes to designate King Leopold. 2 "This conclusion," Henri de Man remarks with humor, "was manifestly erroneous: under the Constitution, the King could quite well dismiss his ministers and have this dismissal and the nomination of their successors countersigned by one of the latter. This error in interpreting the Constitution not having been recognized in time, one may say that those who would have been chosen had a narrow escape!"

"Immediately after this interview, at nine o'clock in the evening, Count W. de G.1, at my request and in my presence, telephoned the London embassy this text, which I dictated to him: 'The King would like Frédéricq to obtain from Gutt, if he is in London, or from another minister, his agreement that his signature may appear on the act of resignation of the ministers currently in office and on the appointment of a new minister. Once verbal agreement has been urgently obtained, the act handed to the Embassy should follow.'"

"This message was taken down and repeated for verification by Viscount de Lantsheere at the London embassy."2 Under the date May 27, de Man notes: "At seven o'clock, W. de G. brings me the reply, signed by our ambassador in Paris, Le Tellier, sent from Paris at 3:30 in the morning, retransmitted by London, and arrived at Wynendaele at 5:50: Unanimous negative reply. Le Tellier."

In these conditions it is impossible to doubt the King's intentions on the eve of May 28, 1940: he wanted squarely to throw Pierlot and his gang out the window; he had announced to them that if their government continued, they would be "necessarily against him."

For a long time people thought that it was from this violent position that the royal intransigence flowed which manifested itself so implacably thereafter.

Yet there had been an entr'acte, a staggering entr'acte. One must have the official document before one's eyes to believe in the possibility of such a reversal on the King's part.

What is this document? It is a recognition by the King of the legality of the Pierlot government, in application of Article 82 of the Constitution. And what is its date?

It is dated June 2, 1940, that is, only four days after the capitulation of the Belgian army.

On May 25, the King announced to Pierlot that if his government still acted, it would be against him. On May 26, he demanded a blank authorization to dismiss it and appoint its successors. And on June 2, the King's chief of cabinet, Baron Frédéricq, and Colonel van Caubergh, officer of the King's Military Household, sent by Leopold III across war-torn Europe, arrived at top speed in Bern and sent posthaste from Bern to Poitiers Viscount Berryer, urgently summoned from the Paris embassy, so that he might assure the Pierlot government that the King recognized it as his own Government!

What, then, had happened? Had Pierlot disavowed himself? On the contrary! He had launched a radio proclamation in which he accused the King of having "opened separate negotiations and dealt with the enemy," of having "broken the ties which united him to his people," and of having "placed himself under the power of the invader."

At the same microphone the Pierlot government had permitted the famous manifesto of the "Belgian press" to be read: "King Leopold III has betrayed his country. He has failed in his constitutional oath. Belgium today feels covered with shame. But she does not wish to accept the dishonor inflicted upon her today by a traitor. She asks France not to judge her by a felon king."

There had been more than these unheard-of insults. There had also been, on that same May 28, 1940, trumpeted likewise in all radio broadcasts, the two decrees of the Pierlot government: the first proclaiming the "impossibility of the King's reigning," the second, still more wounding, decreeing "the disappearance of the King's name in the acts where that name was required."

These unheard-of texts, which in fact meant the public deposition of Leopold III, instead of stiffening the King, broke the last threads of his sensitivity, strained to the limit by all these trials.

There is nothing insulting to the King in saying that he is hyper-nervous. The most famous specialists in Europe, notably the German Professor Gebhart,3 were called to treat this illustrious case. To deny this pathological aspect of the Leopoldian problem is to leave human truth. 1 W. de G.: Willy de

Grünne, grand master of the Queen's household. 2 HENRI DE MAN, Cavalier seul (Cheval ailé). 3 Condemned to death at Nuremberg and hanged by the Allies in 1948.

This illness manifested itself in very characteristic crises, first on May 25, 1940, then after the Reynaud-Pierlot speeches, then on the King's return from Bruges to Laeken, when he was on the point of meeting Hitler; a fourth time on the occasion of the King's visit to Berchtesgaden; in May 1945, at San-Wolfran, during the discussions over the Sovereign's return to Belgium, not to mention numerous other minor incidents.

I do not give these details to create scandal. If I wanted to create scandal, there are other details--not without interest for doctors--which I would bring concerning the strange repercussions, painful or grandiose, that the well-characterized hereditary disease from which Leopold I suffered had upon the Belgian dynasty: Leopold II's genial megalomania, the madness of his sister Charlotte, the deafness of the Count of Flanders.

I make use of King Leopold III's neurosis because it is necessary, because history is history and men are men: flesh, nerves, will, triumphant or failing. And I prefer a Leopold III passing from white to black and from black to white because his nerves betrayed him, but who always retained great nobility in his patriotic feelings, to opportunists like Pierlot and Spaak, with the robust nerves of slaughterhouse men, who ate their word ten times and turned with every wind according to their fear, their needs, and their craving for power.

When King Leopold heard on the radio, on May 28, 1940, the outrages with which he was overwhelmed, when he realized, he who had been too adored by his courtiers, that he was being dragged through the mud before the entire universe, as no sovereign had ever been in the history of the world, he was shaken to an unimaginable degree.

Henri de Man, who was on the spot, told me at length about these tragic hours. The King was as if mad, hands in his hair, weeping, or straightening up, haggard. There is nothing humiliating in that. This man was suffering terribly in his pride. He saw himself delivered, bound hand and foot, to the fury of the insulters.

Passing from one extreme to the other, impressed by the timid opinion of certain legalists, he saw no other solution, in order to circumscribe the scandal and contain the excesses of these moral regicides, than to slacken the rope, stretched to the point of breaking. On that day he was Louis XVI putting on, to avoid the worst, the Phrygian cap of the rabble which had just insulted Queen Marie-Antoinette at his side and planted on the tips of its pikes the heads of his faithful Swiss.

That is how the disconcerting reply of Leopold III on June 2 to Pierlot's abominations and to his two decrees of quasi-deposition became psychologically possible: the King legally confirmed Pierlot in a power that he had categorically denied him three days before his radio exploits.

"From the conversations I have had with M. Frédéricq," one reads in Viscount Berryer's report, "it clearly emerges that the King does not intend to enter into a struggle with the government of Poitiers, but that he validates its legal situation."

This about-face changed nothing, obviously--in politics, to be weak is always a fault--in the spite of the insulters; it did not even prevent them, on June 18, from smashing the bust of Leopold III on the Baudoinville and throwing the pieces into the Gironde, as if they had been bits of crockery!

This communication of June 2, 1940, served only to give audacity to Pierlot and Spaak when, starting June 18, it was a matter for them of having the King cover their pro-German maneuver. Pierlot, if he is stubborn as an old angry mule, is not especially stupid. As for Spaak, he is intelligent, adroit, subtle. I therefore could not understand why these two men persisted in harassing Leopold III. Everything became clear to me when the existence of this document was revealed. The two cronies believed they had the King in their hands.

It was thus quite natural that Pierlot and Spaak, on June 19, turned toward Leopold III and asked him for advice, since, despite May 28 and despite Limoges, he had once more recognized them as his ministers.

But the French capitulation provoked, two weeks after this message, a second reversal in the Sovereign's mind. This capitulation justified his conduct in May. It was he who had seen clearly! Pierlot and Spaak had been mistaken. The memory of their conduct revived in his mind. No, he could not forgive the affront he had suffered. He would never forgive it.

That is why Minister Delfosse--though not a Limoges man--who came offering to countersign a royal act involving the resignation or modification of the Government, was turned away. His offer was not even examined.

To Pierlot's letter of June 26, the King refused to allow his offices to reply. He tolerated only, as we have seen, the sending of a verbal answer from his chief of cabinet, an answer of six lines in all, scourging, in which care was jealously taken not to use the expression "Pierlot government," it being replaced by the wounding formula: "Messrs. Pierlot and consorts."

"Messrs. Pierlot and consorts" might thereafter multiply appeals and offers; they ran up against a wall of silence.

Already on May 25, at Wynendaele, in asserting to Pierlot and Spaak that the Germans would certainly not accept their remaining his ministers under the occupation, Leopold III had manifested his evident desire to get rid of them. Once the entr'acte of early June had been annulled, the King behaved rigorously as if this Pierlot ministry no longer existed.

When I went to Berlin on April 2, 1945, to ask him to free the King--as well as the Belgian women deported--Minister Ribbentrop, evoking the past, declared to me in the most formal manner that the banishment decree had been taken by the Reich against the Pierlot team only because the King had expressed the wish for it.

Three weeks had not passed since the "consorts" had ceased their functions when the famous d'Ursel instructions, in reality "royal instructions," went out from Bern across the world.

Count d'Ursel began his message in these terms: "I have received precious instructions dated August 28 and I have the pleasure of communicating them to you, as I have received instructions to do."

What official would have dared to take responsibility for such grave instructions to the Belgian diplomatic corps, committing the entire foreign policy of the country, when Spaak had been gone for four months, when the secretary-general of Foreign Affairs was absent, when the department practically no longer existed, without at least consulting the Palace of Laeken? What official would

have dared to order an ambassador as prominent as Count d'Ursel to transmit these instructions if they had been no more than an invention of his own? How could Count d'Ursel, in close contact with the Palace, in constant correspondence with it, charged by it with special missions, ever have risked spreading throughout the world indications proclaimed precious without knowing that they expressed the Sovereign's thought, without knowing that they were given by him? Moreover, the role played by the embassy in Bern during the events of 1940 leaves no doubt as to the plainly "inspired" character of all the initiatives taken there.

As for the document itself, it is enough to reread it to be convinced that it is not in the style of an official used to passive roles: "When we had reached the extreme limit of the territory, after having done everything possible to defend ourselves, we laid down arms."

It was Leopold III who laid down arms, not some vague blackener of paper on the rue de la Loi. This whole message is written in the manner of a leader. It bears his mark.

This document embarrassed certain clumsy defenders of Leopold III and pushed them to laughable denials. What is the use of going against the evidence?

This document, informing all the King's representatives abroad that the war with Germany was finished, denied Spaak and Pierlot the right to commit Belgium to any war action alongside the Allies. Thus the dismissal signified by the Palace from the beginning of July to "Messrs. Pierlot and consorts" was implied in an official document. For the King, throughout the war, Pierlot and his colleagues were nothing more. All the messages which, from London, they addressed to the King remained unanswered. Many times, in this regard, Pierlot and Spaak could not contain their irritation and bitterness. Once, it seems, the King would have had the intention of replying. If this letter--and besides it was not a letter, but a note without addressee, only a few lines, which did not answer in any way the precise requests of the London ministers--if this letter did not leave, excessive thurifers affirm, it is because the man who was to carry this missive to England got himself locked up by the Gestapo. Truly, for royal prestige it would be better not to abuse such weak fables. If the King had wanted to correspond with "Messrs. Pierlot and consorts," it was not one courier who would have been at his disposal, but fifty, but a hundred! They rained from the sky every week. Let us not forget that an airplane had even been offered to the King to go to England, and that this airplane was really ready to leave.

These contacts with the Allied clan were child's play. I myself had them. On my return from the Caucasus in 1942, an American messenger was waiting for me, sent by the former United States ambassador at Vichy, to make me offers absolutely identical to those which had decided Admiral Darlan to go over in Algeria. Two perfectly valid passports had been prepared for two of my collaborators, thanks to which they could go at once to Barcelona, where the consul general of the United States was charged with receiving them, in case I gave my agreement in principle to the opening of such a negotiation. I refused, for I am not a turncoat like Spaak and Pierlot. I was fighting the Soviets, allied with the Americans. This struggle against communism was sacred. I was resolved to carry it through to the end, whatever that end might be.

But this proves that contacts with the Allied clan were within the reach of any Belgian personality, and all the more within the reach of Leopold III. He could, if the thing had interested him, have written a hundred times to "Pierlot and consorts" throughout the four years the war lasted.

If the King did not have these contacts, it is because he did not want to have them. The proof that his bad humor did not disarm is inscribed in the extremely stiff text which, before being taken to Germany

in 1944, he insisted on leaving at Laeken to signify--even absent--his radical opposition to a return of Spaak and Pierlot, unless they solemnly retracted their outrageous remarks of May 28 and 31, 1940.

The royal crisis of bad humor continued even after the war, without the slightest attenuation.

It is funny to say, but it is only because they have impossible characters that Leopold III and his Prime Minister missed by a millimeter the possibility of being Quislings.

If Pierlot had not been an unbearable grumbler, stubborn and complaining, he would have remained beside the King at Wynendaele, and Belgium would have awakened with a collaborationist Government. Events would have impaled Pierlot irretrievably.

If the King, for his part, had not been a neurotic, he would, in July 1940, have continued, as on June 2, to practice forgetfulness of insults, and he would have permitted Pierlot, as head of the legitimate Government, and Spaak to open, as they asked, peace negotiations with Hitler's Reich.

Our defects, at least as much as our qualities, stimulate and guide us. Our passions carry more weight over our actions than our principles. Corneille is beautiful, but Racine is true.

Certainly the wheel of destiny could, in 1945, have turned in a completely different direction. But, having turned as it did, one must recognize that if Belgium spared itself, at Hitler's fall, painful discussions with the Allies, it owed this in good part to the combined obstinacy of a dyspeptic Prime Minister and a neuropathic king. If they had been two normal beings, they would without any doubt have plunged headlong into European collaboration, which would have earned them both the completion of their destiny at the execution post, at the hour of "democratic" recovery.

One must nevertheless be fair. They were not two but three who saved their skins in this way. Let us not forget the indissoluble association, during this period, of Pierlot with good fat Spaak. He too owed to one of his defects the chance of having passed beside a bad destiny. This defect is ambition. Everything in him is explained by ambition, and it is because of ambition, after having betrayed so many men and so many principles, that he ultimately and quite by chance found himself on the right side of the barricade.

At the end of August 1940, Spaak had fallen to the very bottom of adversity. Politically, he was no more than a tramp. He was repudiated by everyone in his fatherland. He left Vichy because the last cable of his chance on the continent had broken.

Confirming the liquidation of the Government, Minister Le Tellier, our ambassador at Vichy, in contact with Spaak every day, had just sent on September 2, 1940, to his colleague in Switzerland this mortuary telegram: "The ministers of the Belgian government in France have ceased their functions." Neither Pierlot nor Spaak knew where they would run aground. Misfortune pursued them everywhere, even after they had left--with great difficulty--French territory. On September 8, M. Le Tellier addressed to a colleague these fierce lines: "Pierlot and Spaak, who were supposed to leave for the United States, are still, I believe, stuck in Figueras."1 But political ambition brings a man back up from the deepest abysses. It is a call that never lies. Spaak could not have lived without a ministerial portfolio. He always made me think of Henri Jaspar, the former Catholic Prime Minister who, having tasted power, had kept such nostalgia for it that he admitted to me one evening in a car that he would accept any department whatsoever, even Communications, to become minister again. He was so tenacious, so clever, so intriguing that, by favor of a crisis, the King charged him with forming a new government.

That day he experienced the greatest joy of his life. Jaspar spent three days consulting the parties. But his plan did not come together. He had to go to the Palace to inform the King of his failure. That very evening he fell dead.

Pierlot was only an old chipped jug in the adventure of 1940. Spaak, on the other hand, would have done everything, given everything, betrayed anyone, to remain in the atmosphere of power, which had become his life.

In everything, one must first seek the man. The history of the Belgian government in London was essentially the crisis of a man.

Spaak repudiated his king at the end of May 1940 to cling to Reynaud; at the end of June 1940 he believed that the Reich was master of the continent "for a thousand years"; he then threw himself toward Germany, going, to secure his chances, so far as to offer to put his signature at the foot of a separate peace treaty with the Third Reich; brutally pushed aside by the Germans, he returned to Leopold III, whom he had betrayed; pushed aside by him, he lowered himself to begging Henri de Man, the man who had just stabbed his party, to obtain the King's forgiveness in order to save him from political death. These contradictions and humiliations attest a tragic continuity, that of a man possessed by the demon of politics and sacrificing everything to it.

Intelligent, Spaak realized that there was no further chance for him among the Germans, nor with de Man, nor at Laeken. He also knew that in London they were ready to accept anyone. Times were hard there on the threshold of winter 1940. Any wood could make an arrow.

Churchill was badly informed about Spaak and Pierlot's pro-German maneuvers during the summer. He made it understood that he would ignore those troubled months. Spaak pushed Pierlot before him, a dreary dangling mannequin. Spaak alone could not constitute a government on legal bases. Pierlot in London meant the resurrection of the old ghost of government. Everyone would pretend to forget that it no longer had any legal existence.

There was a London government only because this government had not been able to be a Brussels or a Berlin government. If Hitler had permitted it, if the King had yielded, Spaak would have been a collaborationist minister in the autumn of 1940, with de Man, with me, with others. He would have officially accompanied King Leopold to the Führer in November.

Spaak knows better than anyone that I am not exaggerating. I am sure, moreover, that he makes no reproach to himself. He has been faithful to his motto: Spaak first. He succeeded. What does the rest matter! And why should he be more severe with himself than his own compatriots are? Is he not heaped with honors, adored, pampered?

In politics, immorality is not a defect. Success is the only criterion!

XIX

LONDON RESISTERS

When Spaak "floated." - How Marcel-Henri Jaspar became a "resister." - His dismissal by Pierlot. - Belgians adrift in England. - Kamiel Huysmans in flight. - The odyssey of the Belgian aviators who left for the R.A.F. - Their persecution by order of the Pierlot government. - Their condemnation as

"thieves." - The Grünne trial. - Reading of these judgments before the Belgian troops in France. - Pierlot, Count of Wiesbaden. - Dead heroes and triumphant schemers.

During these five months of tergiversations, Spaak had dropped King Leopold III for the Allies, then he had dropped the English for Hitler, then he had come back from Hitler to Leopold III, from Leopold III to Henri de Man, then from Henri de Man to Churchill, after having considered going to the Americans. He had wanted struggle to the bitter end, he had abandoned struggle altogether, then he had gone back to struggle to the bitter end. All this in the space of about one hundred and fifty days!

In 1941 Spaak admitted, with cynical candor, that only the concern to place his bet well had guided him during this phenomenal journey. In a confidential letter sent to London on February 22, 1941, to the banker Félicien Cattier, to explain these numerous palinodes, he wrote, unconscious in his humor: "Being not at all sure that England could resist the German push, we asked ourselves what had to be done, and our position proved floating."

But while Spaak, who has breadth, was thus floating, certain Belgians--very few, moreover--had put out to sea and landed in the United Kingdom. We shall see how the future "resisters" Pierlot, Spaak, and their cronies treated these resisters of the first days.

Apart from Vleeschauwer, charged with a mission as administrator of the Congo and "departed in equivocation," another Belgian minister had not wanted to sink at Bordeaux or "throw in the sponge" as Pierlot and Spaak did on June 18, 1940. This minister was named Marcel-Henri Jaspar.

A Protestant, a wastrel, a plucked magpie of politico-finance, but without rancor when one had kicked his backside, perfumed, walking in small steps, buttocks clenched as if he were wearing a girdle, he had represented in various ministries the very numerous group of survivors of money affairs.

He was no more anti-German than another, but he had married an Israelite woman, red-haired and brave, who, at the trials I had had with her spouse, attended every hearing, teeth clenched, valiantly taking her share of the blows I delivered. I had admired this woman. Love is a gift, not a bargain. It offers everything, is ready for everything, asks nothing, weighs nothing. Marcel-Henri Jaspar's wife had no outward charm; her hair resembled a squirrel's fur, her skin had the somewhat acrid grease of people of her race. But she loved. Love is the most beautiful spectacle in the world, whether it springs from the heart of Cleopatra or from that of a less privileged mortal.

Mme Marcel-Henri Jaspar had no more left her husband in the flight across France than she had left him during his trials. During the last days in Brussels she had camped in the Ministry itself, accompanied by a few highly colored friends and improvised attachés who had attached themselves to the husband on May 10 because they feared being picked up by the police. The final night had seen about ten of them drink twenty-five bottles of Pommery, then sleep side by side on the ministerial floor. The caravan had first fled toward Sainte-Adresse and Le Havre, still just as conspicuous, under the shepherding of a famous Trappist, Father Marie-Albert, prior of the Abbey of Orval, whose pectoral cross produced a funny effect amid this ambulant harem.

Poitiers-Bordeaux was the last stage of the Pierlot government. It was then that the great drama broke out.

Marcel-Henri's wife was convinced that all Jewish women were being scalped, skinned, quartered, and cooked over campfires by Wehrmacht scouts. She held against herself a phial of poison, quite

determined to absorb its contents as soon as she saw the first feldgrau motorcyclist. Marcel-Henri, not usually Corneillean, found himself placed before the dilemma: England or death. He chose England.

Thus was born the Belgian Resistance in London. Chance does extraordinary things. I, the hardest hitter against Marcel-Henri Jaspar, was to be the only Belgian witness to his embarkation. I had just got down from a prison train before the roadstead of La Rochelle, in company with four hundred convicts, shaven, dressed in coarse cloth, barefoot in large white wooden clogs, who were being taken to the sinister fortress of the Île de Ré, the last relay before Guiana. We waited in silence for the ferries into the bottoms of which we would be piled. Thirty meters from us, a boat had hoisted the full dress flags. A guard of honor was drawn up on both sides of the landing stage. Cars arrived. The troops presented arms. I then recognized with emotion the red figures on white ground of the Belgian plates. It was Marcel-Henri Jaspar fleeing toward the British Isles!

We were both deputies for Brussels. We had fought each other for four years. Yet, although I had hunted him with fierce vigor, he had not held it against me. A funny fellow. He was not wicked. He was rather amoral and weak. Deep down, he knew well enough that I had struck rather true. After all our fights, he had come toward me, before the whole Chamber, hand extended. He was not a grumbler. If he had seen me chained thirty meters from him on the quay at La Rochelle, I am sure he would have had me brought aboard his boat, with his wife and her phial of Veronal.

I was sent down into the hold of a pontoon, mingled with all the other captives. Through the hatches the policemen struck us on the skull with rifle butts, to pile us in more tightly. And I no longer saw the multicolored little flags which flamed above the quarterdeck where worthy Marcel-Henri, departing toward his destiny, had just taken his place.

At night, when we had been chained in the narrow cells of the fort, dug into the very rocks beaten by the sea, I heard the Stukas arrive, howling, to attack the Allied ships which were leaving the French coast in the moonlight. I thought of poor Jaspar, on whom the fish were going to feast for breakfast. Two days later, when a launch took me away in haste, I saw the overturned hulls of the destroyed ships. But the pretty flagged boat had passed through.

Marcel-Henri Jaspar was therefore, in June 1940, the only Belgian minister who had held out. He was in the place where the Allies still resisted. His case was analogous to that of General de Gaulle, with the difference that he was, himself, still a minister when he set foot on British territory.

Pierlot, Spaak, Janson, and Denis had renounced. What did "throwing in the sponge" mean, if not that these noisy boxers were leaving the ring? Vleeschauwer was galloping toward Castile. Jaspar was perfectly entitled to consider himself the last member of the Belgian government to face the enemy.

He was therefore the Brussels de Gaulle, with more perfume and less prestige. He launched an appeal to Belgian combatants and to the captains of Belgian ships, asking them to rally to England in order to resist there. The first Belgian resisters of London--there can be no doubt on this point--were Marcel-Henri Jaspar and the few Belgians who responded to his appeals.

They were strictly in the line of the Spaaks and Pierlots swearing at Limoges on May 31, 1940, that they would fight faithfully to the end alongside the Allies. They had made this noisy affirmation the sole justification of their campaign against Leopold III. Either Limoges had been a mistake, and it had to be said. Or else the word given two and a half weeks earlier to the British Empire should not have been withdrawn on June 18, 1940, even if France withdrew its own.

But from the moment when Spaak, seeing the Germans victorious, decided to bet on them, it was certain that he would furiously condemn any act which, honoring his own oath, might risk compromising his chances with the Führer.

The French armistice had barely been negotiated when Pierlot and Spaak, burning to go to Canossa, threw their colleague Jaspar overboard, the only one, in truth, who, voluntarily or involuntarily, had remained honest in the whole affair.

Pierlot and Spaak wanted at any price to prevent the Reich from being able to oppose this resister's appeals to the proposals they were preparing to make to the Nazi generals of the Wiesbaden Armistice Commission. Thus Jaspar, the killjoy who interfered with dancing in circles with the victorious Germans, was noisily and immediately excluded from the Pierlot-Spaak ministry. In order to be able to prove, by a public act, to Hitler's delegates that they were truly repentant, converted, that they were henceforth docile and faithful, that they had not tolerated for an instant that a Belgian remained on the British side, Pierlot and Spaak did not content themselves with eliminating Jaspar; they sent to the press of the whole world a communiqué trumpeting the major excommunication launched by them against this inopportune London "resister": "The Government absolutely disavows all declarations or initiatives of M. Marcel-Henri Jaspar, who is considered to be excluded from the Government."

So that this exclusion might fully take on its official character and produce the maximum effect upon the Germans, Pierlot and Spaak insisted on inserting this text, that very day, in the columns of the Moniteur belge, then being published by them at Bordeaux.

In July, Jaspar continuing to preach resistance, the Belgian government in France publicly recalled this defenestration once more. And General Denis, Minister of National Defense, went at it with an order of the day to the troops in which he explained: "After mature reflection the Government considered that the concern to rebuild Belgium (sic) prevented it from continuing on the road it had traced for itself and from taking its place beside England. The rupture which has occurred between the latter and France shows that it was right to act as it did. It does not hesitate to consider as excluded one of its members who, without informing it, had gone to Great Britain. Today it is no longer a matter of fighting."

Thus the political resister Jaspar, coward, tainted man, anything one likes, but resister No. 1, arrived in London the same week as General de Gaulle, was repudiated by Pierlot and Spaak, then terrified at the thought of displeasing Hitler. This did not prevent them, a little later, from being the great profiteers of a resistance which they at no price wanted to see manifest itself and to which they passed over only when they were definitively convinced that Hitler and Leopold III would not rescue their "floating" wrecks.

Never afterward did Pierlot and Spaak--the latter was nevertheless his crony--forgive Marcel-Henri Jaspar for having been a Londoner before them. His presence within the Belgian government in London would have too strongly recalled to his rivals their anti-English position from June to August 1940. Jaspar was shunted onto a siding by being named ambassador from the Moon to the Czechoslovak Benes, in London itself. After the war he was sent to Prague. That was not yet far enough. From Prague he was catapulted to Buenos Aires. His presence was truly too embarrassing.

Out there, in the pampa, he must often have told himself that he had been very stupid in being virtuous. Nothing, absolutely nothing, predisposed him to it. It was not his style, and it was the very first time. If he had turned his coat five or six times in four months, like Spaak, he would have kept his ministerial

portfolio. He had repudiated his word only at Limoges. That was not enough. It was wounding to the others. It was normal, just, necessary that he expiate it.

Marcel-Henri Jaspar had not been the only Belgian to land on English soil. In the extraordinary chaos of the end of May 1940, when the passage toward the interior of France was cut, numerous Belgian refugees and "withdrawn" officials, no longer knowing where to flee, had climbed aboard the last craft heading for the British Isles. Fishing boats from Ostend, Blankenberge, and La Panne also reached, as best they could, the English shore. These brave people had been carried away by the whirlwind; they had yielded to panic. They wandered like the gulls of the North Sea which utter their sad cries in the storm.

Belgian soldiers, driven back to Dunkirk, had hoisted themselves by punching onto any boat at all, despite the English. They too landed along the great pink cliffs of Dover and Folkestone.

Finally, a few Sabena aviators had landed on English airfields, almost abandoned, which nothing defended.

Ten of Goering's fighters escorting twenty Junkers could at that moment have seized any air base in the United Kingdom. The Reich missed, at the end of May 1940, its finest chance of the war. Fuel stocks, supplies, cars to improvise motorized columns--everything was there to be taken. Essential landing fields would have fallen almost without a shot. It was child's play to run from there toward a few well-chosen points on the coast. England was at the Reich's mercy.

Our aviators, coming down there at random, realized perfectly that if they had been Germans they would have landed with the same ease. Some left again for France without the slightest difficulty. Two of them, Lieutenant Albert Lassoit and Lieutenant Léon Closset, famous pilots of the Congo line, later made the whole Eastern Front campaign with us.

These Belgians, whatever they were--civilians, soldiers, aviators--were completely abandoned in England by the Pierlot government. They received no instructions. They were considered dead Belgians, of no interest at all.

The funniest bird that circled in those troubled times above the Thames was a long plucked raven, fleshless, the color of wet sand: Kamiel Huysmans, a dried-up Mephisto with a bony skull, wobbling at the top of an interminable yellow neck whose skin shriveled like an old papyrus.

Huysmans was burgomaster of Antwerp. He had fled on the pretext that the Germans detested him. This was absolutely false. He was the only Belgian burgomaster who had officially gone, before the war, to Nazi Germany. He, a Marxist leader, had been received in Cologne by Gauleiter Grohé, a general of the S.A. He had paraded among the Brownshirts, on reviewing stands, in banquet halls decked with swastikas, and had exchanged warm toasts with Hitler's representatives, ending to the sound of the Horst Wessel Lied.

The burgomaster of Liège, also a socialist, condemned to death by the Germans in 1914-1918, remained at the head of the Walloon metropolis in 1940. Huysmans, he, the crony of the Rhenish Gauleiter, had cleared out at the first rumors of combat, trembling on his stilts of ill-omened bird.

One day, in 1946, a Catholic deputy, naively honest, reproached him in Parliament for this not very glorious flight. Huysmans replied, without any disturbance, that he had saved himself because he

greatly valued his skin: "I prefer," he hurled sarcastically, "a living Huysmans to a dead Huysmans!"

The Chamber burst out laughing before so much wit. The war dead could have replied that it would have been easy for them too to flee. But they were dead and now had--it served them right--only the right to keep silent!

This fugitive so pleased with himself, so proud of having been intelligent when others got themselves patriotically killed like imbeciles, was later to take his place in London among the mantelpiece ornaments of the Pierlot-Spaak household. One would see him, his skull wreathed in these proud laurels, become head of the Belgian government in 1946, just as Van Acker, in 1940 a partisan of Henri de Man's "defeat-deliverance," became Prime Minister in 1945, just as Spaak, the rejected supplicant of Wiesbaden, would be in 1947!

Had Huysmans died, such a promotion would not have been possible. Huysmans did well not to die!

At the moment when Huysmans was putting his bones, so precious for the fatherland, into safety in London, a few young Belgian soldiers, daringly escaping from a France submerged by the Wehrmacht, had managed to land or touch down in England after sensational adventures.

Those men were paladins. They had not run to London, like Jaspar, because their wife was going to send a bottle of Veronal down her throat, or because the water of fear was running, as with Kamiel Huysmans, down their spine. One could say of them that they were undertaking a mad enterprise. But a man who deliberately goes to meet death because he believes in something is always respectable, even if his ideas are chimerical.

For Pierlot, for Spaak, who at the end of June 1940 were selfishly calculating their chances of being cleared on the Hitlerian side, who were scurrying about in Pétain's offices to obtain from the French delegates at Wiesbaden their willingness to present to the Germans their crawling requests for armistice, for these Double-Patte and Patachon with coats so promptly turned, the Belgian aviators who refused to "throw in the sponge" and stretched their lives toward death were absolutely unbearable nuisances.

Yet, even more--and above all with more nobility than Marcel-Henri Jaspar--they were logical. Spaak and Pierlot had, on May 28, vituperated against the King's capitulation. They had called all Belgians who had got out of the Flanders pocket in time to fierce struggle. They had sworn to remain faithful to the Allies. Had any new fact, from the point of view of Belgian resistance, occurred?

The Belgians who, holding to the appeals of May 28, ran to London a month later to continue a military resistance which they believed, in good faith, to be in accordance with their country's interest and their political ideal, were volunteers for death, desperadoes animated by a faith of the highest quality, whether it was well or ill directed. But they disturbed Spaak's clever maneuvers, veering from the Gironde toward the Rhine. Upon them, even more than upon Marcel-Henri Jaspar, fell the governmental excommunications.

These authentic resisters--the others, the Jaspars, the Huysmans, were never in the end anything but involuntary resisters, resisters who had been unable to resist, the first his wife, the second his fright--these warrior resisters were treated by Pierlot, Spaak, and Denis in an abominable fashion.

Yes, Pierlot and Spaak paraded a hundred times at the inauguration of monuments raised to the glory of

the "Resistance." But when the first resisters hurled themselves boldly from lost France toward an England virtually condemned, they had no enemies more relentless and vile than the ministers of the Pierlot-Spaak team.

The Government could at least, in their case, have closed its eyes. The most elementary decency imposed this upon it, after its declarations at the end of May. Yet it ordered these resisters to be prosecuted in absentia by the Belgian Councils of War, already flattened before political power. To please the Pierlot government and not displease the victorious Germans, the Belgian military courts struck these volunteers, who had left for the United Kingdom once France had been overwhelmed, with years in prison. These hypocritical judges, pharisaically basing themselves on the fact that the aviators had flown away with their aircraft--obviously!--condemned them as "thieves"...

Thieves, the young Belgians who were making the gift of their lives! If they had fallen back at that moment into the hands of the police of the Pierlot-Spaak government, they would have been sent into French fortresses!

Most of them died heroically, still "thieves" in the eyes of Belgian law, a law applied against them with ferocious rigor, hypocrisy, and bad faith, by order of the Pierlot-Spaak government, at the very moment when that government was frantically trying to haggle away Belgium among the German generals of Wiesbaden!

This struggle of the Pierlot-Spaak government against the resisters of 1940 reached the summits of ignominy during the trial in absentia brought against the Belgian aviator Count de Grünne, who, withdrawn into France, had thrown himself into his airplane at the moment of the armistice, escaped the German troops, and landed on the fields of the R.A.F.

The Grünnes are a race of knights, with burning blood but a soul pure and clear as springs. By choosing this one, they wanted to make an example, still more spectacular than the others.

One de Grünne, Eugène, had been killed before Liège at the very beginning of the campaign. Another, Xavier, as sublime a hero as his brother, had had his arm shattered by a German bullet during the May campaign. The third de Grünne, the London resister of June 1940, was prosecuted and condemned as a "thief." Yes, a thief!

Always the same tactic: soil the adversary, cover him with mud. Exactly as Janson, Spaak's uncle, had done with us on May 10, 1940. Exactly as Spaak and his band would do with our unfortunate comrades of the Eastern Front in 1945. Smother, under coarse brands of infamy, the ideal of the man one fights!

A thief, Count de Grünne! Thief... of his fighter aircraft. A military auditor in the field, a man named Anciaux, from Liège, dared to prosecute on this charge. He obtained the conviction. And one saw a Grünne, a race which for ten centuries had given everything to the fatherland, condemned while he was fighting in the British sky for "theft of equipment to the prejudice of the Belgian army."

Above all, let no one imagine that this was an isolated conviction, an act of baseness and cowardice due to an irresponsible or demented judge. No. It was a tactic. These judgments pronounced in series, all cast in the same mold, had been obtained only after official pressures. The Government was so proud of the conviction obtained against Count de Grünne that the Minister of War, the senile Denis, ordered it to be read before the front of the Belgian troops cantoned in the south of French territory. That is how it was.

At the same moment, the said government was returning to the Reich authorities our cadres of officers still free and delivering to the Germans our military materiel saved during the two capitulations!

The man who took his aircraft to the "Allies" was a "thief." But the Pierlot government, which delivered to Hitler, in the autumn of 1940, the Belgian materiel that had remained in France, ended in 1944 by monopolizing the glory and the profits of the Belgian Resistance.

Most of the aviator "thieves" of 1940 died as heroes from 1940 to 1945. But their insulters and persecutors are very much alive: Pierlot became a count--Count of Wiesbaden, no doubt; Spaak splashes about like a happy sperm whale in the gilded waters of high politics.

The former--the heroes, the naive, but the pure--kept their honor intact, but they paid for it with their lives.

The latter--the scheming politicians--had the honors, honors which did not cost them dearly: only a string of repudiations and a mountain of young corpses which they abundantly soiled in 1940, and on top of which they then hoisted themselves.

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XX

AN EVENING AT ABETZ'S

The collaborationist epidemic. - Ten possible ministries. - The Reich embassy in Paris. - Otto Abetz, the lover of France. - “Your compatriot Henri de Man.” - De Man-Degrelle, complementary forces. - Complete conjunction. - Through de Man, to the working masses. - De Man, envoy of Leopold III. - His secret missions. - Hitler decides to summon me. - De Man signs. - Waiting.

What Belgium lacked in the autumn of 1940 was not candidates for collaboration; it was collaboration.

The candidate collaborators (all Belgians were that!) filled the horizon, packed together like clouds of locusts, voracious locusts, frantic, each of them wanting to climb on the backs of the others: the V.N.V. with Staf De Clerq, Elias, Tollenaere, Romsee, Borginon; ex-socialists with de Man; communists with Lahaut; money magnates or Freemasons with the Lippens, the Deveze, the Empain, the Delhaye; Catholics with the Tschoffen, the Bodart, the Delfosse; newspapers in which, very far forward and looking after her own interests, the star of the Propaganda Staffel, Marie-Therese Rossel, was bustling about.

Cardinal Van Roey allowed priests as famous as Cyriel Verschaeve to invite the public to “throw the bridge that will connect Flanders to Germany.” He received people of the new order at his archiepiscopal palace (me, for example), and was ignorant of nothing that was being plotted at Laeken.

The King’s emissaries, very busy, spread out to left and right, approving, encouraging.

In the summer of 1940, there was enough material in Brussels to form at least ten collaborationist

ministries: one of shopkeeping, presided over by Raymond Delhaye of the Bon Marche; a super national-socialist and monarchist one, presided over by Henri de Man; another of Lippens, centered on the Lodges; one of Tschoffen, centered on Christian democracy, the banks, and the bishoprics; one of Staf De Clerq, centered on the Flemish colonization of Liege and Charleroi; a feminist one with Miss Rossel; a Semitic one with De Becker and Levy; a Greco-Turkish one with Moromati; a military one with General Van Overstraeten; one of Wiesbaden, with Pierlot and Spaak, more determined than anyone, despite their torn trousers, to climb back to the top of the greasy pole.

For collaboration, what was lacking was partners. Lippens had run in vain, Staf De Clerq had harangued the Payottenland, de Man had launched proclamations, Pierlot and Spaak had delivered trucks and cannons, Delhaye had sweated in his trousers: the Germans had remained impenetrable.

The only serious indication I possessed, for my part, was the confidence Otto Abetz had made to me in Paris, according to which Ribbentrop wished to see me as soon as possible.

The King’s Palace, on 21 August, through Count Capelle, had been informed of this project, which the Pierlot government, as early as 25 July, viewed favorably and encouraged. It even leaped at this opportunity to reconcile itself with me, no doubt in the hope of thereby entering into contact with the authorities of the Third Reich. Pierre Daye, speaking to the ministers, had not beaten around the bush. He had explained to them that these negotiations at Abetz’s would inevitably lead to Ribbentrop and probably even to the Führer. That was a reason for them to push me all the more warmly toward these talks. In order to soften me up, it was Janson, my executioner of 10 May 1940, who had been charged with making known, in writing, that they would be very glad to see me enter into negotiations in Paris with Hitler’s ambassador.

Thus, on the King’s side, I was covered. On the side of the moribund Pierlot-Spaak-Janson government, I was covered. There was nothing left but to wait and, when the moment came, to act.

The moment came. One morning, an attaché of the German embassy appeared at my property on the Drève de Lorraine, bearing a diplomatic envelope with a green eagle: Otto Abetz asked me to dine at his house in Paris the day after the next, a Sunday evening.

The Reich embassy in Paris was a masterpiece of grace, neatness, and freshness. It was installed in the rue de Lille, halfway between the Palais Bourbon and the charming Hôtel de la Légion d'Honneur, one of those narrow streets of old Paris, with walls never repainted, with yellowed curtains, where concierges so nimbly send their buckets of dirty water into the boots of passers-by.

A policeman in a short cape, his kepi pushed back, his nose the color of the daily bottle, was strolling ten meters away from two Wehrmacht sentries, stiff, straight as two palm trees made of armored sheet metal.

The embassy building had belonged, one hundred and thirty years earlier, to the Beauharnais. Queen Hortense had made it an exquisite mansion. The Hôtel de Beauharnais had preserved its Napoleonic character intact. On the first floor there was still the faience bathtub, small, brilliant, and colored like a flower vase, in which the passionate daughter-in-law of Napoleon had so often let, while dreaming, her body of fire, destined for such dangerous pleasures, be refreshed.

The Empire furniture was of the highest class: proud series of mahogany armchairs with green silks, tables with marvelous inlays of multicolored marbles and bronze mounts worthy of conquerors and

gods.

Otto Abetz was a refined artist whose very pure taste naturally accorded with the sober lines of Empire art. His wife, a young Frenchwoman from Lille, had in her veins, like all her compatriots, the exact sense of grace, measure, simplicity, and detail. The two of them had completed and refreshed the work of the Queen of Holland, thanks to a few pieces of furniture approaching the rank of masterpieces, thanks to discreet and delicate paintings and sumptuous carpets, the honor of Flanders and the Savonnerie, and also thanks to the miraculous flowers with which the embassy was decorated. Never have I seen roses so sensual, so deep, camellias so living, so captivating, with soft and strong flesh, textured like skin, tempting as fruit, such prodigious azaleas, reaching two meters in height, like trees of paradise.

All Paris sent flowers. The greatest names of the French armorial slipped themselves behind those voluptuous petals. Never was any woman showered with flowers like the gentle and sensitive Madame Abetz, queen of the Paris of 1940.

But these glittering tributes hurt, for these dukes, these marquises, these countesses crawled too much. The flowers were not discreet enough. The rush of all Paris toward the Reich embassy would have been improved by being less tumultuous on the morrow of the humiliation the French armies had just undergone, and while so many fresh graves marked the roads of autumn. Paris, the city of the heart, is the city of forgetting. It is a woman-city. Trembling, it gave itself too quickly to its conqueror. Abetz spoke in the name of the strongest; Paris gave itself to him, curious for new emotions, already happy to be taken.

All those flowers were a symbol.

Otto Abetz did not let himself be intoxicated. He was a simple fellow, a good stocky Baden man, with a tender heart, sentimental as a shepherdess, robust, delicate, of a joyful mind, never malicious, and always underlining a caustic reflection with an affectionate smile.

He deeply loved France and had devoted to it an artist’s admiration that often led him to concessions of which he was later the victim. The verb finassieren was conjugated in every tense by the partners of Vichy, while excellent Otto, open-handed, had thousands of Frenchmen released and brought the ashes of the Aiglon back to the Invalides.

He was intelligent. He was generous. But he was taken in. Never, in my opinion, will the French sincerely get along with the Germans. Nor, for that matter, with anyone. In this respect, nothing has changed since Richelieu. Kindness can do nothing about it, nor the frankest desire for understanding, nor force.

On the contrary, the wider the world becomes, the more the Frenchman, embittered at no longer being the world by himself, will stiffen. His fundamental pride will develop, will grow more bitter, in proportion to the rise of other peoples.

Otto Abetz was surrounded by thousands of flatterers, because Paris insists on having stars and because he was the only star of the winter of ’40. But, politically, his interlocutors, just as much as the Petains and the de Gaulles, or formerly the Clemenceaus and the Barreses, were incurable xenophobes.

A German, Friedrich Sieburg, once gave one of his books this title: Is God French? To every

Frenchman, that question mark seemed an enormity, almost an outrage. And even then the clumsy German had inverted the terms!

Outside the Frenchman-God, there is the common run of mortals. Anyone who has not grasped that will never understand anything about the international reactions of the grandsons, more or less legitimate, of Louis XIV and Bonaparte.

Otto Abetz, in September 1940, was still in his honeymoon with France. A rosy twilight, that delicate rose mingled with light gray which gives the sky of Paris the softness of eighteenth-century pastels, was slipping through the foliage of the nearby Tuileries. From Queen Hortense's garden pavilions, one looked down upon the Seine, still lively between the plane trees scaled with wounds of gold. But seated on the terrace, one had the illusion that the branches of the Tuileries indefinitely prolonged the gardens. The harmony of the fresh greens of the lawn, the black greens of the foliage, edged with rose beyond the water, called up the songs of Anna de Noailles.

We were silent. Someone came to fetch Otto Abetz. He reappeared long afterward. The half-light had descended in silence. A silhouette stood out, which I did not know. A chandelier was lit. Abetz introduced the visitor to me: "Your compatriot Henri de Man."

I had never spoken to de Man until then. I had no idea I was going to meet him. Twenty times he could have made my acquaintance in Brussels. He had preferred that a German bring us together.

I immediately scented what was unusual in this meeting. De Man was accompanied by a young woman of exquisite grace, the very one who, before the war, had presided in her Brussels boudoir over the birth of young Europe, stretched out on a lion skin beneath a fragile flowered dress. Her skin bore, at the corners of the eyes, the first filigrees that time inscribes even on the most delicate faces. But she wore, with consummate art, an almost imperceptible veil that sifted the brilliance of the lights and gave them delicate, immaterial half-tones. Beauty is also a matter of intelligence, application, and self-observation.

This splendor, with the long legs of an agile huntress and the divinely greyhound-like loins, was there, quite obviously, only to adorn the setting.

It had been intended—by whom? de Man, Abetz, someone else?—that de Man and I should be tête-à-tête. Would there be, or would there not be, incompatibility of temperament between us?

I adopted no attitude, judging it preferable to show myself at once as I am. De Man, for his part, did not seek to maneuver either. After dinner we talked for two hours, near a fine crackling wood fire. I was in no way prepared for this conversation. Thinking I would meet only Abetz, I had come from Brussels with a load of old atlases, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which were evoked the splendors of the Great Burgundian Netherlands that I dreamed of gathering together a second time, like Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, my inspirers.

Those atlases, with their old colors marvelously vivid, sang the glory of Arras the Faithful, of Lille with the Lion, of Cambrai with the Eagle, of Middelburg, city of departures, of Maastricht, the old metropolis of faith, of Bois-le-Duc, resting place of the unifying princes!

Ortelius Plantin atlases, decorated with sumptuous cartouches, extravagant animals spread over unknown lands, sails dedicated to the Virgin, sea monsters cut out against the warm blues of the seas,

islands of rose or pale yellow, the munificent garments of the Holy Roman Empire! Original editions, broad as the antiphonaries of old abbeys, or tiny, bound in pigskin, which had once guided pilgrims, knights, merchants, sailors, along the roads of land and water, to the ports of the Hanse, to the fairs of Champagne, to Compostela, to the Barbary slave markets, or to the glittering capital of the Grand Turk.

More severe atlases of Mercator, who had spent three years pacing the roads from Ypres to Aalst, from Ghent to Bruges and to Damme, before drawing the map of Flanders!

Atlases of Kaerius, grouping in his Germania Inferior the seventeen roses of the seventeen Burgundian provinces!

Atlases of De Visscher, with the map Novum Belgium of today's United States, then discovered by sailors from Amsterdam and peasants from Hainaut, all sons of the same fatherland!

Blaeu's "Steedenboeken," where, precise as the pictures of miniaturists, beneath ash-gray and rose clouds, spread the plans of all our old cities, from Luxembourg to Zealand, from Bethune to Friesland, where nothing was lacking, neither the imperial eagle on the shutters of the Antwerp Town Hall, nor the smoking lime kiln, nor the linen bleaching, nor the coach galloping, nor the miraculous well of Saint Godelieve at Ghistelles!

Simple poetry of precise times! Colors that the centuries had not deflowered! Sumptuous reflections of the centuries when our seventeen provinces formed the richest continental bundle! It was the old splendor of my fatherland that I thus carried everywhere its rights to resurrection might be discussed.

A hundred times I have leafed through these beloved atlases before the most prominent personalities of Europe,1 to remind them that we were a people of masters, that we had proved ourselves for a thousand years, spread wealth, civilization, order, beauty as much as Venice, Cologne, and Mainz, three, four, five centuries before Berlin was anything other than an isolated village at the end of its sandy heaths.

De Man, for his part, looked at these testimonies of glory with a distracted eye. His soul had nothing epic about it. He was a statistician, a maker of plans, a laboratory theoretician. But precisely for that reason, we were complementary forces. I had the gift of poetry, the electricity that lifts crowds. De Man, learned while also being shrewd, had professorial patience, index cards, a taste for the abstract. We were two men without psychological complications. Politically, we held in our hands different publics whose conjunction could constitute an exceptional force, a serious base, a moral justification for a new State.

As for our political and social positions, they harmonized completely. De Man, long before 28 May 1940, had abandoned the old Marxist and democratic fads. I had, since school, been more "social" than the socialists. We therefore came to agreement.

Abetz withdrew for a moment with de Man, then returned, beaming. He then drew me into his office. He asked for the direct line with Ribbentrop and informed him that the former president of the P.O.B., delighted by the interview, was ready to work in a team with me.

I had said yes as well, not only because de Man had pleased me—intelligent, cunning, modest—but because de Man represented the socialist masses, a capital element in Belgian life, without whose agreement any political power is only an instrument of domination and not of federation. De Man would secure contact with those six or seven hundred thousand workers' households, would allow me

to reach them personally, to communicate to them a powerful mystique, the leaven of every political and social revolution. De Man would be the technician of the new regime; I would be its animator.

However, another reason had motivated my decision.

1 It is almost unnecessary to add that this collection, unique, I believe, in the Great Netherlands (I possessed about ten thousand maps, colored at the time of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries), was, at the "Liberation" of 1944, pillaged, stolen, scattered to the four winds with asinine stupidity. These champions were not waging the war of Greco-Latin Culture and Civilization for nothing!

I had spoken at length to Count Capelle, on 21 August 1940, about my contact with Otto Abetz. His half-silence on this subject—though entirely sympathetic—had somewhat disconcerted me. I had the thunderbolt explanation of this reserve when I suddenly saw, on the terrace of the Reich embassy, outlined against the backlight, the silhouette of my compatriot Henri de Man.

Henri de Man was in fact, in 1940, the King's political confidant and, above all, his friend. At the express request of Leopold III, he had not been taken to an Oflag, so that he could remain at the disposal of the Sovereign. He went three days a week to the Palace of Laeken. No one was listened to by the King with as much interest as he was.

I knew from a very direct source what decisive influence he had exercised over Leopold III before and after the capitulation. Before the war already, as is known, the King had charged him with secret missions to Mussolini, Ciano, and the high personages of the Reich. Queen Elisabeth and he were intimate friends (they had, so to speak, not left each other during the hostilities). Thus de Man had been, since 28 May 1940, the only Belgian political leader who regularly approached the King, who spoke to him directly, at length, often. When, on 24 and 26 May, on the eve of the capitulation, Leopold III had wished to form a government to replace Pierlot's, it was to de Man that he appealed, and it was de Man who was charged by him with obtaining the blank signature of one of the ministers to be dismissed.

De Man had obviously not committed himself lightly in this meeting. If, after two hours of conversation with me, he had given his adhesion to Abetz's project, when it was the first time he had seen me, it was certainly not without having, as always, first asked the King's opinion.

I was moreover to learn shortly afterward that de Man had, on several occasions, been sent on mission by Leopold III to Abetz since the day of the capitulation, and that he was unofficially maintaining the liaison between the Monarch and the young and so important representative of M. de Ribbentrop.

A capital step had therefore been taken. I had the feeling that I was committing myself on entirely secure ground, having opposite me de Man, the King's trusted man, his adviser and confidant, on the one hand; Abetz, then Ribbentrop's number-one trusted man, on the other.

The fact that Abetz had, that very evening, informed Ribbentrop of the result of the confrontation proved to me that Berlin attached importance to the event.

I was staying in Paris in a small unpretentious hotel, thirty meters from the church of Saint-Philippe-du-Roule.

I liked that quarter of antiquaries and booksellers, where one afternoon I had discovered a little Velvet Brueghel painted on copper, with enamel-like gleams: pinkish shells, red tulips, does springing from a clearing, a half-nude young woman, her mother-of-pearl ankle boots and her scattered combs at the water's edge. In the morning, I breakfasted on a few croissants in a nearby bar. Happy times when no one thought of bodyguards and terrorists, when café terraces were peaceful gardens, when my little girls dragged me by force to sniff the warm smell of Paris above the mouths of the metro.

I had left the Reich embassy in the middle of the night. The following morning, a large car came to fetch me at my hotel. Abetz wished to see me urgently.

The Germans are birds of darkness. Hitler worked until dawn. There had been long telephone calls during the night. Ribbentrop had called Abetz back after communicating with the Führer. The Reich ambassador was charged with announcing to me that Hitler had decided to have me summoned. The interview would take place in about ten days. A car would pick me up in Brussels itself. I was asked not to leave my house so as to avoid any delay.

We walked for a long time, Abetz and I, on the golden lawns of the embassy. The water spread by the gardeners scattered thousands of shining droplets over the grass. Birds passed by, gamins, Paris birds. Life was gentle. It was beautiful. The great day was approaching when I would be able to create. All the possibilities I had felt in the depths of my being since my childhood vibrated like sunlit waves. Everything seemed fraternal to me: the smooth foliage, the Seine flowing gray and silver along the gleaming quay, and above our heads the blue square of the sky, a mirror in which my burning soul was reflected.

Otto Abetz and I had quickly sympathized, no doubt because I was, among the people he saw, one of the rare ones who owed him nothing, neither money nor interventions.

We had the same tastes. And then, in the domain of affinities, there are divinations and spiritual accords more rapid than all the calculations of reason. Mysterious call of souls. Otto Abetz had, after three meetings, become my friend. At the end of the war, when he was already nothing and I myself would soon brush against the abysses, we formed a truly fraternal affection. He is the German whom I loved most deeply. I have never read his name in a newspaper, since his imprisonment, without feeling moved, touched by real suffering.

He was a magnificent idealist, pure, strong, luminous, who saw far ahead, who could powerfully have helped in the construction of a just and humane Europe. I am sure that, despite the shadows and pains of the present, his hour will return. The torments with which his French executioners have overwhelmed him will remain one of the shames of our age.

I returned to Brussels by way of Laon, perched on its stone spur: narrow streets in slate tones, mansions with noble terraces opening on the flat country, a squat cathedral with blue and gray towers, the color of the sky.

The war had left everywhere the marks of its roller of iron and fire: old villages crushed, monuments to the dead pierced at random by a shell, little graves in the embankments of the bloody Chemin-des-Dames, big scorched tanks whose ridiculous tracks dragged in the dust at the top of a wooded bend or in the curve of a hamlet whitened by the sun.

In Belgium, Le Pays réel had reappeared. Brussels heard, in the evening, the interminable squadrons of

the Luftwaffe passing over. The rhythm of the engines filled the perfumed air of those autumn nights, damp scents of the powerful breathing forest, scent of late flowers, heavy with life.

At the North Sea, hoisted up on the sand dunes with their sharp marram grass, one could see, beyond the mysterious and singing waves, the russet and pink glows of London burning, crushed under the torpedoes.

Meticulous in everything, the Germans had gone back to Henri de Man's house, so that everything would be perfectly settled before my interview with the Führer. Dr. Max Liebe, attaché at the Reich embassy, came to communicate to me the text by which Henri de Man confirmed to M. de Ribbentrop that he accepted working with me within a new Belgian government.

Dr. Liebe did not merely comment on the text. He showed it to me. I can still see the three typed lines, followed by the signature of my future ministerial partner. I saw them so clearly that I added my signature beside that of the former president of the P.O.B.

Thus everything was in order. I had only to wait for the interview with Hitler. We were at the end of September 1940. I was to wait until 20 February 1944!

XXI

THE TORPEDOING

Gossiping Brussels. - The growing intolerance of the V.N.V. - Rex considered as a rival and an obstacle. - Flemish culture and German culture. - The danger of fragmentation in the West. - Opposition of the V.N.V. to teamwork. - Jealousy at the announcement of the Hitler-Degrelle interview project. - Flanders, Wallonia, Great Netherlands. - My governmental plan. - Composition of the team. - I would have convinced Hitler. - Sabotage at the Militärverwaltung. - Veto of the V.N.V. - Mad quarrels among the Dienststellen. - Adjournment sine die of the Belgian case.

Brussels, in September 1940, was hardly anything anymore but a gossip shop. Everyone had his secret to slip into the neighbor's ear: every morning, the King and Degrelle were taking bicycle rides on the Boom road; Hitler was going to marry the V.N.V. senator, Mme Marechal; the Flemish language was going to become obligatory in Lille and in Wallonia; Verviers was annexed to the Reich; the Germans' landing in England was an accomplished fact.

In an atmosphere of plots and tall stories, the announcement of my imminent visit to Hitler passed from club to club, from Dienststelle to Dienststelle, with the rapidity of lightning.

The news was confidential. But indiscretions were inevitable. The German embassy in Brussels had been kept informed by Dr. Liebe. The Militärverwaltung, for its part, could not fail to have been informed by the Reich authorities. Reactions occurred at once, reactions coming from powerful competitors whose plans were radically opposed to mine.

They were going to unleash a furious offensive that torpedoed everything—their chances as well as mine—opening in Belgium the great crisis of anarchy that lasted throughout the occupation.

Certain leaders of the Vlaamsch Nationalist Verbond (V.N.V.) had not waited for these rumors to run before conducting, against Rex in general and against me in particular, an insidious, corrosive

campaign intended to undermine my credit and that of the Rexist Movement with the Germans.

Outwardly, this campaign had nothing offensive about it. The leaders of the V.N.V. were in 1940, as always, very correct in their man-to-man relations. Later, after the numerous disappointments that the Eliases and the Romsees were to experience, their contacts with us would even become very friendly again: they would have had the opportunity, in the meantime, to see that we were the surest natural allies of Flanders.

Unfortunately, that conception was not admitted by everyone in the V.N.V. in 1940. The latter, turned upside down by slogans of living space and the colonization of weak peoples, had thrown itself headlong into a tumultuous and fanatical battle, haughtily rejecting the idea of collaboration with the French-speaking Netherlands, and no longer considering Walloon territory as anything but a future colonial domain for the use of the Flemings.

It still admitted a common State, and even desired it, but on the following bases: the central power submerged by its men; the southern provinces converted into a zone of expansion for Flanders. Staf De Clercq used the word “colony” without circumlocution.

Certainly Flanders had had to endure for a century numerous forms of oppression. The reaction against these errors and faults had prepared the victory of the V.N.V. But to pass from a vanished oppression to a new oppression, oriented in the opposite direction, was to provoke new disturbances and, above all, to weaken oneself politically and morally. A State is truly strong only if it is just. One does not have the right, on the pretext that one has suffered, to make others suffer; nor to impose abuses because one has oneself endured them.

The V.N.V., in the summer of 1940, was lifted by a thrust of intolerance, fairly understandable, because everything seemed assured to it, but which was the deep cause of the failure of its work, a failure it had to register, powerless, in 1943, isolated by its own fault, torpedoed by its former protectors, after having done everything to torpedo us with them in 1940, at the moment when, sincerely united, we could have obtained from Hitler a just, honorable, intelligent, and proud solution to the problem of the Western space.

We had not yet left the democratic prisons, Flemings and Walloons, in July 1940, when the break had revealed itself as total: before the sarcastic French jailers, the Flemish-nationalist internees had provoked a whole scandal on the occasion of the celebrations of 11 July (the Golden Spurs, victory of the people of Flanders) and 21 July (anniversary of the swearing-in of the first king of the present dynasty).

Obviously, 21 July 1831 had also consecrated the break-up of the Great Netherlands. That secession was, indisputably, a catastrophe. The Flemings are not the only ones to deplore it. Anyone who knows the glorious history of the Leo Belgicus, anyone who has trembled while studying the centuries of greatness lived by our seventeen united provinces, can only weep over the weeks of provocation and stupidity that saw the marvelous, fertile, indispensable unity of the Northern Netherlands and Southern Netherlands sink, for the second time, in 1830.

But setting one date against another under the eyes of the foreigner, under the eyes of torturers who were overwhelming both groups, signaling to them with fanfare differences that were quite uselessly brought to light in those convict prisons, betrayed a nervousness, an aggressive spirit that filled me with sadness and apprehension.

Back in Brussels, I had to recognize that my survival had annoyed rather than delighted certain extremists.

Yet I had fought beside the V.N.V. for years and I could still bring them the effective help of the Rexist crowds. But the V.N.V. no longer wanted help from anyone, claiming in 1940 to impose alone a program whose limits it would fix without discussion.

A New Order movement parallel to its own, in Walloon territory and in Brussels, no longer appeared to it except as an obstacle. Having proclaimed its will to colonize the Walloon space, the V.N.V. had no use for Rexist teammates. It believed itself strong enough to do without all support.

I tried, in vain, to explain to the Flemish nationalist leaders that the times that were coming would be much more dangerous for the moral unity of Flanders than those it had known in the unitary Belgian State of 1930-1940.

A French-speaking Wallonia, sheltered by its very language against excessive grip by the culture of the victor, would be infinitely less exposed to intellectual submersion than a Flanders considered, already before 1914, by many German political writers as an old German land, whose language, cut off from its original sources, was a drifting Plattdeutsch.

Flanders in 1939, after fifty years of fierce struggle, had succeeded in immunizing itself against the competition of French culture, which was in general regression throughout its territory. In the Belgian State of 1939, Flanders had arrived at a solid cultural autonomy. Flanders was going, normally, to radiate more and more, to acquire an ever more dominant influence in a State where, through the simple action of the acquired laws and through the constant increase of its population, the capital role was henceforth allotted to it.

By contrast, one had to be blind not to understand that, despite the offices obtained in 1940 and despite a few successes of prestige, Flanders would find itself, once Germany was victorious, facing a foreign culture and propaganda such as it had never seen develop on its soil.

In August and September 1940, everything seemed marvelous. But in two years, in five years, all Flanders would be inundated with German publications—literary, artistic, scientific publications—launched with powerful means, presented with the luxury that large print runs make possible, written by contributors of worldwide renown whom only journals and newspapers of immense circulation can attach to themselves at the price of gold.

What would become beside that of the Flemish publications, less well presented, less rich in content, costing more because they were not able to amortize their expenses over hundreds of thousands of copies? They would be the poor relations. The comparison would be crushing, despite the noblest efforts. Flemish culture would become, whether it wished it or not, a regional culture, worthy certainly of respect, but regional all the same, supported as such and limited as such.

And the youth? After so many struggles for the Flemicization of the universities of Louvain and Ghent, what would become of higher education in Flanders? The Flemish student would feel himself naturally attracted by the universities of the Reich, famous thanks to their professors chosen from among one hundred million inhabitants. Germany would make an enormous effort to shape the university youth of the Germanic countries. The interest of that youth would be to acquire in Germany a formation that

would give it a field of action twenty times greater than that promised by Louvain and Ghent. German scientific works would, quite obviously, be more interesting, renewed more often, and sold more cheaply than volumes published here and there in the Flemish language by a local professor.

And furthermore, the phenomenon of attraction would act on professors of Flemish origin, themselves also tempted by the chairs and publishers of the Reich, which would assure their thought an increased radiation.

For narrow Flemings, as certain V.N.V. leaders were, anxious about everything that was not moedertaal and often guided by a parish-pump spirit, it ought to have been obvious, blindingly obvious, in 1940, that Flanders was going to face, culturally, the greatest temptation of its history. That three V.N.V. governors were named, that Staf De Clercq was allowed to speak of colonizing the Borinage coalfields, had only passing importance. It was a news item, a detail. It was the essential that had to be settled. More than ever, instead of driving us back inelegantly and sometimes even haughtily, the V.N.V. should have formed a powerful bloc with Rex to endow the West—restored, in the south, to its historical frontiers—without delay with a durable, harmonious federal statute, coordinating the Flemish and Walloon political forces, under whose shelter the contributions of the great Germanic body could have been received happily, usefully, without danger of absorption or consumption.

My position was radically opposed to the narrowly nationalist, or more exactly regionalist, tendency of many V.N.V. leaders of the time. For me, not only regionalisms but even nationalisms were surpassed. These, instead of opposing one another proudly and stupidly, ought henceforth to come together, federate justly and honorably, form a unity superior to each of them, continental unity. I believed in the necessity of creating a harmonious Europe, a Europe projected suddenly into the field of political possibilities by the military flood—the “defeat-liberation” of Henri de Man!—carried out from Narvik to Bordeaux, from Lublin to Cherbourg.

I was convinced that Germany and, more broadly, the bloc of Germanic peoples would be capable of constituting the grandiose hearth where this unity would be forged. But it would still be necessary for this unity to be a work of polarization, of federation, and not of mastication and imperialism.

Force is often a temptation. It quickly leads to excesses. The victorious Reich risked being tempted by pride, as so many other triumphant States had formerly been. Napoleonic Europe, with such fascinating promises, had died because of the megalomania of one man and one nation. Led astray by easy successes, Hitler’s Germany could also launch itself into a policy of thoughtless expansion and clumsy fusions.

For the very success of the gathering of European energies, it was necessary to contain immoderate appetites, to create the new Europe by stages, not by leveling it by means of an enormous steamroller, but by intelligently uniting its various centers of culture, work, and wealth, which would preserve, and even develop to the maximum, their cultural and historical personality.

But to mutilate, in the face of an overflowing Germany, the Belgian space, already reduced century by century from Philip II to Louis XV, from Waterloo to the insane and sacrilegious revolution of 1830; to go to meet European Unity in small rival political clans, was to compromise the possibilities of maintaining the proper genius of the West within the great continental unity in formation.

That is, alas, exactly what the V.N.V. did at that time: it pushed aside its partners of the French-speaking Netherlands, went its own way, claimed to rake everything in for itself, and finally, when

everything had been thoroughly divided and weakened, was no longer able to resist the pressures and certain annexationist maneuvers coming from a Germany which, nevertheless, in 1940, had been ready to stabilize the West while respecting its originality.

The V.N.V., socially and politically, thought like Rex. The conflict resided only in its will to monopolize to its own profit the life of the entire Belgian space, leaving to one half of the country only a minor role, and even that only during the time necessary for its colonization. It was exactly the contrary that should have been done in 1940.

I had always fought so that Flanders could flourish fully, through rigorous recognition of its rights. From my university days, I, born on Walloon soil, had fought bitterly for Flanders. In 1936, when Rex, in full development, represented a force superior to the V.N.V. (twenty-one Rexist deputies, sixteen V.N.V. deputies), I had, not without losing feathers, engaged all the prestige of Rex to support the just theses of the Flemish nationalists and to demand, in agreement with them, the constitution of a federal State.

To treat us with haughtiness in 1940 lacked elegance first of all, and political sense afterward.

The salvation was to remain united, in order to obtain recognition, within the European Empire in gestation, as in the Germanic Empire of Charles V, of the existence of a true “Circle of Burgundy,” a clearly distinct political and spiritual hearth, reestablished, according to the old data of history, beyond the atrophied borders of 1839.

In any case, it was important to save the principle. And the principle, in 1940, was materially and politically represented by the nine provinces of the Belgian State—wreckage, certainly, but also points of possible recovery for the glorious Netherlands of old.

This provisional reality was susceptible of immediate arrangements that would fully guarantee the rights of the Flemings to their own life. A week of joint study of the problem would have brought us all into agreement, without any difficulty.

But this agreement, in 1940, the V.N.V. did not want; it even opposed it, not understanding to what point it was isolating itself, intoxicated by its violent and
vain speeches about maximalism and colonialism.

It was not I who had asked Hitler to invite me. Chance had arranged things in such a way that I was the only Belgian politician Hitler knew personally. He had seen me only once. But that man trusted his intuitions and believed only in direct contacts.

On the other hand, the Rexist Movement had an international radiance, while Staf De Clercq was totally unknown outside Flanders. Hitler had never seen him, never did see him, and personally paid him no attention.

The fact that it was I who was being summoned provoked among certain V.N.V. leaders a violent explosion of jealousy. Among them, the persecution complex was often at work. They were wounded to the highest degree by Hitler’s choice. “So,” they cried, “it is as before, always the Walloons at the head!”

God knows how little importance that question always had for me. The exact type of the irredentist,

originating on my father's side from the Romance region of Maubeuge (exactly, Solre-le-Château), torn from Hainaut by French imperialism, and on my mother's side from the Germanic country of the Moselle (exactly, Grevenmacher), torn in 1839 from the single Luxembourg of our ancestors, I do not consider myself a Walloon: I am a man of the Netherlands. I feel alive only where the Netherlands existed and were great.

Verviers, Charleroi, Walloon cities but cities without relief in our history, say little to me; by contrast, my whole soul trembles when I see, from the top of the Bruges belfry, the gray-blue canal that leads to Damme and the sea, or when, in Saint Pharailde Square in Ghent, I dream at the foot of the enormous Castle of the Counts that our dukes of Burgundy haunted and where Charles V played as a child.

Tournai and Ypres, Antwerp and Liege, Mechelen and Mons, Aalst and Huy, Courtrai and Dinant, Lille, Douai, Middelburg, Maastricht, cities of life, glory, and greatness of our old Netherlands, extend themselves, with the same fires and the same songs, into my moved soul. I feel more in my fatherland at Dunkirk and at Zierikzee, dislocated watchtowers of our Mare Germanicum, than at Jemelle and Bertrix, artificial towns of my native Ardennes.

By every fiber of my being, I feel bound to Flanders, which for a thousand years nourished the splendor of our Western countries. If a cruel destiny forced me to choose, I would choose Flanders, because there is the heart; there returns, from there departs again, for more than five centuries, the strong and living blood of the Great Netherlands that are my fatherland. There I would still feel myself alive. In an isolated Wallonia, I would feel myself attached to a dead limb.

These stories of domination by one clan over the other have always seemed to me a historical profanation and a nonsense. There is a past of the Netherlands, a psychology of the Netherlands. Before Hitler, I would have defended the rights of Flanders with as much faith, as much love, and as exact a knowledge of its history as any V.N.V. leader.

In 1940, my solution to the problem of the Belgian State was simple: half the ministries to Flemings, half the ministries to Walloons or French-speaking Brussels men; but whatever the minister, two under-secretaries of State beside him, one Flemish, the other Walloon, each of the two holding in hand the totality of services concerning either the Flemish part or the Walloon part of the country, the minister himself acting as coordinating agent and supervisor. In the same way, I would have decentralized the presidency of the Council, or rather the Chancellery, to speak as in the time of our dukes of Burgundy.

Thus there would have been, in fact, two governments, assuring the perfect decentralization of services, but working constantly in liaison. The V.N.V., being the essential element of Flemish politics, would have been assured of a preponderant influence in this federal organism. Moreover, whether we were members of Rex or of the V.N.V., from the point of view of Flemish rebirth, we were entirely in agreement.

I was determined to go still further. I proposed to give this government a very audacious scope, to introduce into it the most interesting and most socializing elements of de Man's team, to call into it personalities of stature foreign to politics, and even, provisionally, two or three representatives of the money powers, in the style of Lippens and Deveze, since such was the King's desire. They would have been, at the beginning, a useful counterweight to the ardor and inexperience of the revolutionary groupings. They knew the ministerial trade. They had leverage over the representatives of the economic forces with which it was quite useless to enter into battle from the first day. In politics, one must not fight against everyone at the same time.

This government, bringing a new formula in regard to the representation of the various forces of the nation, I would have submitted to a plebiscite in which all the men and all the women of the country would have been called to pronounce. Faithful to the King; assuring the flourishing of Flanders, lined up behind the V.N.V.; supported, thanks to Henri de Man, by the working masses; supported, thanks to Rex, by numerous Catholics and by the most dynamic elements of the French-speaking population; enjoying, through the intermediary of the Deveze and Lippens, the support of the economic forces that would guarantee the material solidity of the new authoritarian regime, as the crowd then wanted it, outraged as it was by the democratic anarchy following the defeat; ardently nationalist, fully socialist, vibrant with youth, such a governmental formation would, from the autumn of 1940, have gathered seventy-five to eighty percent of the votes.

The war seemed to have reached its end. Peace would have found this government at work, a strong, optimistic, new government, in direct contact with the nation.

The portfolios my friends might have obtained mattered little. I would have been satisfied with two or three Rex men of stature in the team. I was even ready to enter it alone. I would personally have given unity, fire, tone. Above all, I would have made this government a popular government, reserving for myself the task of stirring up the people every day, of haranguing the workers, of forming the school youth, of binding the whole country to my work politically, morally, mystically.

I was sure of reaching the crowds, of attracting by the millions the gift of souls. Before 1940, with limited means, without radio, without cinema, hunted every day by fifty anti-Rexist dailies, I had acted upon hundreds of thousands of sensibilities. Henceforth I was going to have at my disposal the prodigious machinery of the modern State, the microphones, the screens, the rotary presses. Six months of public action, six months of deep reforms, and the nation would have made one bloc with the revolution installed in power.

The ministerial team, unified in the fire of action, would promptly have erased the differentiations of the first days. That is why it was absolutely indifferent to have at my side only the delegates of the other groups. If I truly carried a message within me, my dynamism would make of them all a single lever.

This plan came close to succeeding. I was sure of convincing Hitler, favorably disposed toward me in advance. Returned to Brussels, I would have placed my possibilities for action at the King’s service. He would have decided in the last resort.

The total liberation of our prisoners—the condition foreseen and accepted at Abetz’s for my agreement with the Reich—would automatically have freed Leopold III and restored his prerogatives to him. Minister Delfosse, who had remained in Belgium, had already placed himself at the Sovereign’s disposal to sign the decrees concerning the liquidation of the old government; the transition would have been accomplished in the most absolute legality.

But the fact that I—rather than they—was being summoned to Hitler, that I could set a new government in motion, irritated to an indescribable degree some of the most prominent leaders of the V.N.V.

These enjoyed the complete support of the occupation authorities. While my captivity in France dragged on, they had besieged many subordinate Reich officials in Brussels. Generally knowing the

German language, they had discussed at length with them and had explained the Belgian case to them in their own way.

The memories left by Borms's attempt to form a Flemish State in 1917-1918 served them to the highest degree.

For a certain number of narrow-horizoned German officials, ignorant of the history of the West, the Flemings were almost Germans, while the Walloons were only Frenchmen of a bizarre, ill-defined species that they did not understand and about which they knew nothing.

The ignorance of most German leaders in Belgium was disarming concerning the origin of the Walloons, the purity of their race, their fidelity for ten centuries to the Holy Roman Germanic Empire. They knew almost nothing of these problems, they informed themselves very badly, almost all of them being ignorant of the French language. My reserve, on my return in August, had without question added still more to this incomprehension.

The V.N.V. leaders had slipped in everywhere, had tied direct contacts with all the German cadres in Brussels; they explained themselves, had their newspapers read, stirred up wind. The Militärverwaltung of Brussels, in 1940, saw only through them, swore only by them.

On top of that, the directives sent by high pan-Germanist personalities in Berlin (Himmler notably) stimulated to the highest degree the policy consisting of supporting the Flemings at the expense of the Walloons. That explains, in particular, the case of the Belgian prisoners, freed or retained in the stalags according to whether they belonged to one linguistic group or the other.

The siege of the Militärverwaltung by the V.N.V. had begun at the start of June. Two months later, the instruction from the occupation authorities forbidding the press to devote more than three lines to my return had been significant. For them I was an undesirable.

Certain fanatics had gone so far as to search, in the thousands of articles I had written before the war, for every line that could be interpreted in a sense unfavorable to the Reich. Since I had been strictly neutral, giving our neighbors right or wrong according solely to the criterion of Belgian interest, the little game of quotations proved easy. Every German office had received its bundle. From Brussels, the dossiers took the road to Berlin, accompanied by solid commentaries.

One can conceive that the announcement of my coming visit to the Führer produced the effect of a torpedo in the offices of the Militärverwaltung. "What, this Degrelle, whom no one had ever seen, was going to be received by Hitler before anyone else, even before the V.N.V. leaders?"

The latter did not have to pour much oil on the fire they had so abundantly maintained from June to August. A general outcry rose all the way to Berlin: it was impossible! The Flemings would never accept it. Every paving stone of Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, and Louvain was going to leap to the sky! The V.N.V. made it known that if I, a Walloon, became the head of a government, it would not go along.

The Militärverwaltung of Brussels was delighted by this veto, which, by contrast, caused the deepest stupefaction at the Foreign Ministry in Berlin. We had been the allies of the V.N.V. until 10 May 1940. At Ribbentrop's office, serious obstacles had been foreseen only on de Man's side. There, the difficulties had been smoothed out, an agreement concluded. But the categorical opposition of the

V.N.V., strongly supported by the occupation authorities, rendered the preparations under way null and void.

Three weeks later, I was informed by the Wilhelmstrasse that the affair was not ripe and that they would see later.

The occupation authorities had given the project the coup de grâce by provoking one of those incidents of precedence and susceptibility in which the Germans are without rivals. A discontented Frenchman flies into a rage and makes a thunderous racket for a quarter of an hour. Once his bag is emptied, he calms down at the first joke. The quarrel ends as banter, with slaps on the back and friendly protestations. It is over.

The German, by contrast, concentrates his irritation. He gets angry over a misunderstood word, over an irony taken the wrong way. He immediately believes that he has been shown a lack of consideration, that his toes have been stepped on, that his prerogatives have been infringed. He becomes solemn, closes himself like a castle gate, takes on a sullen air, stews in his bad mood for weeks. And it is a giant's labor to repair the damage done. The German, who has so many qualities, incontestably has that defect: he is terribly touchy. He believes himself mortally outraged by the slightest trifle.

Often I have wanted to send everything to the devil when I saw some Reich dignitary suddenly take on the complexion of a potato and answer only in monosyllables. After that, in order to see clearly, it was necessary to have him sounded out by a dozen intimates, with as many precautions as if one had to discover stones in his liver.

My visit to the Führer, prepared by the Foreign Ministry through Abetz, ambassador in Paris, was the dream opportunity for a general tussle among all the civil and military Dienststellen: diplomatic action in a Wehrmacht sector, officials from Paris meddling in Brussels affairs! All these fine gentlemen rolled over the drawing-room carpets, shooting corrosive notes at one another like jets of vitriol.

It was such a drama that, to finish with it, Otto Abetz had to come by special train to Brussels to make honorable amends before General von Falkenhausen, talk with him for hours, and retreat all along the line. After that, Abetz had only to drop me if he did not wish to be seriously damaged himself in the quarrel. We saw each other again only two years later. From then on our friendship developed outside any debate on the political future of Belgium.

As for Ribbentrop himself (I learned this only much later), he saw every initiative concerning the countries of the West withdrawn from him, to the benefit of the carefully camouflaged "Germanic" offices of the Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler.

It was total failure. The V.N.V. gained absolutely no profit from it. Never was a Flemish nationalist leader received by Hitler during the four years that followed this stupid quarrel.

The only tangible result was that any solution of the Belgian case was adjourned sine die.

That meeting having been canceled, following the facts I have just recounted, every step intended to get Belgium politically unstuck was doomed in advance to lack of success, since our two principal New Order movements were in complete disagreement.

Thus I was literally thunderstruck when, one morning in November, I learned that King Leopold had

just left Brussels by car for Berchtesgaden, in order to try his own luck with the Führer.

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XXII

BERCHTESGADEN

First missed interview. - Leopold III's regrets. - Seven requests by the King for an audience with Hitler. - Two journeys into the Reich. - De Man charged with pursuing the Germans again. - Princess Marie-José intervenes with the Führer. - The Sovereign's extreme insistence. - The exact scope of the Hitler-Leopold III conversation. - Usefulness of a government in Brussels during the war. - Lippens and Devèze put forward by the King. - Hitler's astonishment. - The dictatorial plot of the King's entourage. - Leopold III's behavior during the audience. - Unfavorable impression made on the Führer. - The Monarch's failure.

After the capitulation of May 28, 1940, Leopold III came very close to meeting Hitler in Brussels itself.

Such a meeting would have been entirely normal. Leopold III was the most important prisoner of war of the Third Reich, the first sovereign taken captive by the German army since Napoleon III. For his part, the King of the Belgians, who regarded the continental war as virtually over, had an interest in learning from the victorious Hitler what possibilities were still reserved for his country and his dynasty.

That Leopold III, during the days preceding the capitulation, had dreamed of having a government in Brussels under German occupation cannot be disputed.

"Will the King have a government in Belgium?" Pierlot and Spaak had asked the Sovereign during the dramatic meeting at Wynendaele on May 25, 1940. "Yes," Leopold III had answered, without hesitation.

And he had his man on the spot at that moment to replace Pierlot at a moment's notice. It was de Man.

In his notes, Leopold III admits having said on May 25, 1940, that "if he had to govern, he would obviously form a government in the event that the ministers left him."

That this government, in the Monarch's mind, would have to have the Reich's approval is not in doubt either: on the morning of May 25, Leopold III had rejected Pierlot and Spaak's offer that they themselves should become collaborationist ministers, stating: "It is certain that the occupier would not consent to it."

An additional protocol, which courteously completed the act of capitulation, had stipulated that "the Château of Laeken was placed at His Majesty the King's disposal for him to reside there with his family, his military suite, and his servants."

That was proper, and of a sort to suggest Hitler's moderation. The King — a prisoner — was waiting at Bruges for his departure to Laeken in the office where, a few days earlier, he had signed a rather original dismissal: that of his future father-in-law. Governor Baets, the son of modest Ostenders, who

had climbed politically by the strength of his wrists, had been surprised by the war in France on May 10. He had been careful not to return to Bruges, where his duty called him. Installed in the provincial palace, seated in the very armchair of the vanished governor, his own pen in hand, Leopold had put a vengeful signature beneath the decree that broke this fearful functionary. His ravishing daughter, Liliane, would be a little less fearful and would give the King tangible proof of it some fifteen months later. This too would end with a signature, but a more peaceful one, under the moved eye of the victorious father-in-law.

On May 28, hundreds of thousands of Belgian prisoners were streaming back without incident toward the Lys and the Scheldt. The respect of the German army surrounded them. The communiqué from the Führer's Grand Headquarters had just paid an appreciated homage to their valor. The King had been treated with great deference by the German Command, which was sensitive to the nobility with which he had wished to share his soldiers' misfortune to the end.

Then there had been Paul Reynaud's unimaginable attack on French radio, with the complicity of the Pierlot government. Outraged in his honor, the King was struck in the depths of himself.

Physically exhausted, his nerves burned by sleeplessness, emotion, anguish, and exasperated discussions with the members of his government, Leopold III had faced the ordeal bitterly; but by May 25 he was already in the midst of a hypochondriac crisis. When the tornado fell upon him, he stood his ground, still had the energy to react, to continue his consultations; but physically and morally he was struggling in an abyss of sadness, nervousness, and anxiety.

These currents, which swirled within him, drove him in a few hours to take the most contradictory initiatives.

The howl of hatred had struck him full in the face and had thrown him back toward positions diametrically opposed to those he had held in the preceding days.

It was under these conditions that there reached him — on May 29 at eight o'clock in the evening — an official communication from which Henri de Man, always perceptive, deduced that Hitler was going to receive Leopold III.

Two messengers from General von Reichenau, Colonels von Bechtolsheim and von Tschuler, had indeed come to inform the King that the following morning, "a German authority superior to the chief of the army groups operating in Flanders" would have an interview with him at Laeken. This could only be Hitler.

It was agreed that the King would leave Bruges for this purpose the next morning at seven o'clock.

At this idea the Sovereign's agitation only increased. At the very moment when, throughout the world, he was being overwhelmed with the names "traitor" and "felon king," so rapid a meeting with the Führer would obviously add new fury to the campaign unleashed in Paris and would bring a kind of confirmation to the accusations made against him of complicity with the Reich.

On Henri de Man's advice, the King went promptly to bed so as to be in better physical condition for the interview.

But he had scarcely been in bed for an hour when he was awakened with a start; a German general was

there, General von Bieleck, bearing new orders. The departure could not take place the following day. The King had to leave for Laeken that very night, so as to be ready in time for the mysterious announced appointment. It was ten-fifteen in the evening. At midnight the King was to set out with his guards.

Leopold III had imagined leaving accompanied by his mother, Queen Elisabeth, and by his whole suite. When General von Bieleck pointed out that only two officers could travel with the Sovereign, the latter yielded to a first public outburst of nervousness. He began to express great fears: "Hitler is going to treat me like Schuschnigg," he kept repeating. All night that prospect haunted him.

The journey was interminable. The road was encumbered with military columns, which had priority. The King became still more agitated. Schuschnigg! Schuschnigg! He could not drive that name from his memory, and already saw himself forced to undergo violence like that which the feeble Austrian chancellor had known at Berchtesgaden in 1939.

The bridges at Aalst were impassable. Long detours had to be made. Finally, it was after three in the morning when the automobile reached Brussels. The King was at the end of his strength.

When they had got out of the car, a senior German officer informed Leopold III that the interview with the Führer was set for eleven o'clock that morning.

The imminence of the confrontation, the tension of the last days, the flood of worldwide scandal mounted against him, this departure without his mother and without his suite, that endless road, the haunting thought of the Schuschnigg case, the return as a prisoner to his château — all this meant that the King could no longer contain his nerves and gave signs of lively displeasure. The German officer stiffened.

The King — Henri de Man himself told me this — then issued an unexpected requirement: "The conversation," he declared, "must take place in French."

Yet the King spoke German adequately. And Hitler did not understand a word of French. The officer telephoned. Hitler, informed of the Sovereign's state of mind, had the answer sent back that, since matters stood thus, everything was canceled. The exhausted King went to bed. Hitler left Belgium without reversing his decision.

Leopold quickly regretted this incident. In any case, it establishes that the King of the Belgians was not in league with Hitler before May 28, that he was not a Quisling, and that, on the contrary, Hitler frightened him. At the end of May 1940, the King feared the worst from a confrontation with the head of the Reich, not only because this meeting would give new arguments to those insulting him, but also because, physically, he feared the Führer.

Yet such an interview could have been very useful at that moment. In the first days of June 1940, Belgium, insulted by Reynaud, enjoyed, by reaction, real popularity in the leading circles of the Reich. Hitler had wished to see Leopold III even before launching the final Somme-Paris-Biarritz offensive. He had hinted that he would consider an immediate and total liberation of the Belgian prisoners. Leopold III, a prince of German race haloed by his prestige as a valiant soldier, a sort of blond hero out of the Nibelungen, was the very type of the young Germanic man. Despite his winter flirtation with Gamelin, he would have obtained many things from Hitler, who was not vindictive. It was the ideal moment. France had not yet received the final thrust. Germany was tense before that combat. She

believed it would be much harder than it was. Consequently she favored the idea of an immediate arrangement with Belgium.

King Leopold, moreover, was convinced of the Reich's complete victory on the whole continent in the short term. "Within a short time, perhaps in a few days, France too will have to give up the struggle," he had declared at Wynendaele on the famous morning of May 25.

After a few days of peaceful life in the admirable park of the Château of Laeken, his nerves at last calmed, Leopold III began to regret the missed opportunity.

It is easier not to break the dishes than to mend them after having smashed them to pieces.

Leopold III first tried to re-establish contact by using the German officers at the Palace. He sympathized with them greatly throughout the war, lending himself to long conversations and playing tennis in their company. Queen Elisabeth was the one who went furthest in this kind of fraternization, making — she and also Princess Marie-José — to the Germans at Laeken, and particularly to Colonel Kiewitz, very astonishing confidences about their intimate life and about Albert I, their husband and father. Leopold III, during the summer of 1940, applied himself to obtaining through them the rapprochement he desired with their powerful master. But these officers were charged only with missions of supervision and liaison.

The King had to resolve to address himself directly to the Führer. But time passed without the slightest answer arriving to the request he had made. He asked again, with the same lack of success.

The Sovereign was now as obstinate in trying to obtain an audience that was being refused him with an indifference that should have struck him, as he had earlier been obstinate in complicating the matter a few hours before the missed interview.

Some defenders of the King, faithful to their usual tactic of systematic denial, shamelessly denied in 1945 that Leopold III had sought the Berchtesgaden interview. They even asserted, with magnificent audacity, that the King went to Berchtesgaden only after having rejected two invitations from the Führer. A third royal refusal could have had dangerous consequences, these generous commentators gravely added.

This assertion is first of all false; it is also completely idiotic. Can one imagine the victorious Hitler of 1940, before whom all Europe trembled, putting up with two refusals from a prisoner and condescending to ask him a third time to accept his invitation?

The King had gone to Berchtesgaden driven by the noblest patriotic motives. By denying the obvious, by stubbornly asserting untruths — when the simple truth, in this case, is so honorable for him — Leopold III was driven into painful denials. In the course of postwar polemics, new documents and unexpected testimonies then came to overturn the childish scaffolding of pious lies improvised by the courtiers who later persisted in making the King into a "resister" and an "anti-collaborator." Yet Leopold III was neither one nor the other, or rather he was successively both, in accordance with what the interest of the country — his only law — ordered him to be.

Concerning Berchtesgaden, as for the rest — neutrality, capitulation, lost war, desire to form a new government, collaboration — the full truth should have been told at once, without reservations, frankly setting forth the reasons of national interest that had decided the King to solicit an interview with

Hitler.

Likewise, it should also have been said from the beginning that after Berchtesgaden, Leopold III went again, in all honor, into the Reich in 1941 for several weeks. Instead of playing with cards on the table, this second journey was fearfully hidden until a vulgar policeman named Léonard Rieder revealed the secret.

This policy of duplicity could only awaken unpleasant suspicions among the crowds. By covering these stupidities, King Leopold so clumsily impaled himself after May 1945.

The King's visit to Berchtesgaden on November 19, 1940, was therefore not the result of a triple summons by Hitler, but the laborious outcome of Leopold III's repeated approaches. Precisely, he came back to the charge six times.

In less than five months, on seven different occasions — and I have this from the most direct source — the King asked Hitler to grant him an interview. It was very poor advice to encourage the King to insist in this manner. Certainly, if the King was humiliating himself, it was out of love for his people and in an attempt to save his country. Whatever happened, he was nothing more than a petitioner to whom the door had been refused. That was a very uncomfortable posture in which the King was placing himself from the outset. Even supposing he were received, how could one imagine that he would be in a position to speak firmly? Moreover, so many supplications served no purpose, for no invitation arrived.

It was then that Henri de Man was called upon. Sent to Otto Abetz, the King's man of confidence tried to obtain an intervention by Ribbentrop with the Führer. But this too was in vain. Leopold III, ever more impatient, then had Hitler approached again through his sister Marie-José. Hitler, generally little sensitive to women's interventions, was nevertheless concerned not to displease his transalpine allies.

Princess Marie-José played, in 1940, a very important role in Belgian affairs, much more important than is generally thought. Without her, it is certain that the Berchtesgaden interview would not have taken place. She liked the Château of Laeken very much, and stayed there for a long time after May 28, 1940. As wife of Prince Umberto, she had a rather tormented married life. The birth of her children had led her to make strange confidences, partly reported, rather inelegantly, in Ciano's Diary.

Her husband, unintelligent and a daredevil, could not always satisfy this magnificent young woman, with her radiant mind and her boldly broad political views. Splendidly "bodied," as the Ardennais say, a superior woman, Princess Marie-José had always "kept her distance," to use the accepted expression. Nothing is so offensive, in fact, as the liberties the masses use and abuse with persons of royal blood, hailing kings' daughters by their first names, when they would not dare permit themselves such familiarity with the daughter of the tax collector of their commune.

Princess Marie-José had reacted sharply, on various occasions, against this typically Belgian lack of manners when, as a young girl, she was still living at Laeken. Her popularity immediately declined. To please the crowds, a king must drink faro in the inn and compliment the waitress; a queen must have herself photographed peeling potatoes and attend military reviews mixed in among the mussel sellers. In a democracy, this is what is called great politics.

Princess Marie-José was a true princess, respectful of her blood and rank. She did not lend herself to these demagogic rites.

In 1940, she rushed to her brother to bring him the comfort of her presence. She then enjoyed a doubly strong position in the leading circles of the Reich. On the one hand, she was the crown princess of the Kingdom of Italy. On the other, she was the sister-in-law of the Prince of Hesse, a distinguished drunkard famous in Rome and Berlin for his binges, but a prominent member of the German National Socialist Party.

King Leopold, persisting in his wish to see Hitler, sent Princess Marie-José off to the Reich. She undertook the matter personally with the Führer, did so much and so well that the Chancellery received the order to prepare an interview.

But Hitler was not a man to let decisions be imposed upon him. He had not refused the future queen of Italy to receive her brother.

However, he had promised nothing. "The King of the Belgians absolutely wants to come to Berchtesgaden? Very well! Let him come!"

An interview obtained in this way could apparently not entail famous results. And I have often wondered how the King, intelligent and subtle, could have embarked on an adventure from which there was nothing to expect and in which he risked ruining his credit.

If Hitler had wished to come to any agreement with Leopold III, he would have summoned him. That did not seem to be the case. On the contrary. The King was appearing at the wrong time and was making a serious psychological error. Indeed, the moment could not have been worse chosen.

For it was the period when Hitler was entirely oriented toward an alliance with France, to which he was ready to sacrifice the interests of his Italian and Spanish friends and therefore, with still greater reason, certain Belgian interests — perhaps the Walloon living space, which certain imperialists in Pierre Laval's entourage coveted very crudely.

Finally, at the very moment when Princess Marie-José obtained an invitation for her brother, Hitler had just seen fail the project, which had interested him keenly, of a rallying around me of the various New Order forces in Belgium. He therefore no longer believed in the possibility of immediately bringing a political solution to the problems concerning the western sector.

Since Walloons and Flemings of National Socialist tendency did not agree, were divided into irreducible groups, and the very future of the Belgian space was in suspense, any discussion of Belgium had to be regarded by him as a waste of time. The royal visit, in the conditions in which it took place, could have no scope.

King Leopold had learned from ten different informers of the V.N.V.'s intransigence and of the cancellation of my visit to the Führer.

Of course, it was not for me, nor for any other political man, to take the initiative in creating a new Belgian government. That initiative belonged to the King alone, and then only on condition that his status as prisoner had been abolished. Besides, it was permissible to think that Hitler, made more wait-and-see than ever concerning Belgium since his meeting with Pétain, would not lend himself to the reconstitution of a Belgian government unless he was assured that it would be oriented toward the ideas of the New Order.

If, for quite a long time, Hitler had answered neither yes nor no to the King's requests, it was because he wanted to leave Ribbentrop and Otto Abetz time to carry out the necessary soundings concerning the project of which I formed the core. The King's visit had interest in his eyes only in relation to this project, and it therefore had to follow my own visit.

Yet before embarking for Berchtesgaden, King Leopold knew that my plan had fallen through, that there was no other, and that absolutely no one apart from me had been approached by Hitler's entourage. What then was he hoping for?

On the very morning of his expedition, various personalities came to Laeken to beg Leopold III not to leave.

It has since been explained to the naïve that the King went to Berchtesgaden solely to discuss extra-political problems, to obtain the return of the Belgian prisoners to the country and... "an increase in the bread ration," as various pamphleteers wrote after 1945 without smiling. It goes without saying that those questions too had to be raised.

But whom will anyone make believe that the King showed so much insistence in obtaining the Berchtesgaden interview simply to speak of these questions, captivating perhaps, but nonetheless of minor order?

The King — there is no doubt of this — wanted above all to speak of his country's political future. For several months Belgium had been living in chaos and ran the risk of being broken up. The issue was to maintain its unity and to re-establish the functioning of its institutions.

To leave Belgium indefinitely without a government was to admit that the very survival of the State had, from the German point of view, become problematic. Each month that passed made this anxiety more piercing.

From the moment the King had the possibility of forming a new ministry, even a mediocre one, even a bad one, a principle would be admitted by the Reich — a capital principle in 1940, when Germany's victory seemed definitive: the permanence of the Belgian State and the maintenance of the country's territorial integrity.

The King was — like us — anguished by this problem. It was to speak of it with Hitler that he was going to Berchtesgaden. He would raise other questions, but he wanted above all to speak of this. In the eyes of the Führer, did Belgium still exist, yes or no? Would Hitler admit that the King continued to exercise his rights as sovereign, for example by freely endowing his country with a regular government?

Since Hitler lost the war, it might seem today that the failure of the Berchtesgaden talks was a blessing.

That is not obvious. On the contrary, it is infinitely probable that a vigorous government, relying on all the New Order forces, would have resisted pressures, requisitions, and deportations much more effectively than the unfortunate Belgian secretaries-general, unimpressive bureaucrats pulled one way and another, threatened in Berlin, threatened in London, threatened in Brussels, and to whom the occupation authorities gave orders as to errand boys.

Belgium was, proportionally, more burdened than France. It had to send many more workers into the

Reich. Politically, socially, and economically, it was totally at the mercy of the Military Administration, because it did not have, like the French, a team of ministers putting in the balance their personal prestige and the support of their partisans in order to resist the Reich's exaggerated demands, to discuss with its representatives, maneuver, and bargain.

The Germans are sensitive to titles and functions. Our secretaries-general were decent people, who after twenty years of fierce effort and obedience had managed to earn five thousand francs a month; petty bourgeois possessing connections only in the modest circle of their colleagues, accustomed to saying amen to their superiors, and having the reflexes of the eternal subordinate.

These men were dignified, disinterested, and courageous throughout the war. But what could they do in the face of a general giving an order? A team of ministers broadly representing the country's new forces, supported by the authority of the King and in constant contact with him, would have discussed with the representatives of the Reich on an entirely different footing. With them one would have negotiated instead of ordering. Many unpleasantnesses would thereby have been avoided for the country. Thousands of Belgian workers would not have perished under Allied bombing of the Reich's factories, because the human levies practiced by the victor would not have been carried out on so vast a scale.

Even if one foresaw an eventual Allied victory, collaboration — an honorable tactic recognized by international law — should not have been abandoned to simple functionaries without personal authority, almost passive instruments of execution. It should have been carried out firmly and courageously by dynamic men capable of inspiring respect, if not total confidence, in the occupiers. The lives of thousands of workers, the freedom of hundreds of thousands of citizens, the health of several million children were well worth the personal risk incurred by a handful of resolute patriots.

The King would have been persecuted? He was persecuted in any case. His ministers would have paid with their blood for their audacity in serving? Probably. But it would not have been the first time that crowds slaughtered those who had compromised themselves for them. In return, for four years, the country would have suffered less. That is certain. And that was worth risking one's life.

Would the Allies later have made Belgium pay for those years of collaboration? What permits one to think so? Did France lose its colonies because of Pétain and Laval? Was Denmark punished for having collaborated from the first minute? And what country was more loaded with favors by the victorious Allies than Greece, which nevertheless had at its head throughout the war a collaborationist government?

What would have happened is that the Belgians would have shot or hanged, with great enthusiasm, friend Degrelle and the members of his governmental team. Then they would have landed magnificently on their feet, more supple and more sly than Gaullists, Greeks, and Danes put together!

The problem in 1940 was, moreover, much simpler. It was not a question of knowing whether a government would be formed that would face a temporary occupation of Belgian territory and try to limit the damage. Almost all my compatriots in 1940 could have made their own the conviction expressed by Spaak: "People believed Germany mistress of Europe for a thousand years." Everything is said in that sentence. It situates the drama exactly.

On the threshold of those thousand years, were we going to accept, without reacting, a descent into the abyss of dead countries, or were we going to attempt everything to reconstitute an official power, the

tangible sign that our people's rights to a life of its own were recognized?

The King was secretly exerting himself; we were exerting ourselves more openly. For the more the months passed, the more our country's chances melted away, the more possibilities were left to dreamers, the ambitious, territory-carvers, and foreign imperialists. A thousand years? As much as to say that political eternity was at stake.

It is understandable that when the King approached Hitler, he was haunted by this problem.

It is impossible to form an idea of what the Berchtesgaden interview was if one relies solely on the royal account, which consists in all of nine questions followed by nine answers, written in a very bizarre fashion. That is little for a conversation that lasted two and a half hours.

The account of the German minister Schmidt, seized in 1945 by the Americans, is fuller — four pages — but it leaves no trace of the remarks exchanged between the King and Hitler concerning a future government.

Yet those remarks existed. During the war, I received direct and formal testimony of them.

Had Schmidt's account reported everything, it would have run to fifty pages and not four.

I myself saw how the interpreter Schmidt worked. It was an extraordinary spectacle. This man served at once as translator and secretary, writing in pencil on a notepad not stenographed sentences, but words snatched in flight, or more exactly fragments of words, which then served him as landmarks. He used them to transcribe into German the essential part of what the interlocutor had just said. Immediately after the interview, by means of these summary notes, he would establish a memorandum in which the conversation was summarized in its broad lines. He systematically pruned everything that had remained vague. His text was no longer anything but a schema. He gave weight only to exchanges of views that had reached a conclusion. I admired Minister Schmidt at work. I know what his notes said and also what they did not say.

That is why I was not excessively astonished when I found in Dr. Schmidt's account not the slightest paragraph relating to the remarks exchanged between Hitler and the King on the possible formation of a new Belgian government.

From the beginning of the audience, Leopold III circled around the question of the Belgian State, trying several times to approach it. But it was not easy to guide a conversation in which Hitler took part. He preferred monologue to discussion.

Finally, after the King had once again brought the discussion to this problem, Hitler — who knew only too well the disagreement among the parties concerned — asked the King point-blank: "But if you had to re-establish a government in Belgium, which personalities are you thinking of calling upon?"

What then took place in the King's head? What had taken place there during the weeks preceding the interview?

At the end of August, Leopold III, through Count Capelle, had strongly encouraged me to collaborate. In September, his confidant and friend Henri de Man had signed, for Minister Ribbentrop, a declaration in which he declared himself ready to enter a ministry of which I would be part. On the other hand,

Leopold III did not ignore the political importance and susceptibility of the V.N.V., nor the practical impossibility there was, in 1940, of forming a government without it.

Had the King changed his mind once again? Had his entourage succeeded in shutting him in, wishing at no price to share an occult power, then total, with a real government and especially one of authoritarian tendency? Had it managed to persuade the King to take up again his old plan — to which he would cling even in 1944 — of a "Directory" composed of three or four almost functionary-like "technicians," infinitely easier to maneuver than public men representing the various tendencies of opinion?

It is probable. The fact is that, in one of his notes supposedly drafted for the King before the Berchtesgaden interview, General Van Overstraeten, the No. 1 autocrat of the Palace, advised suggesting to Hitler, if necessary, "the creation of a sort of economic Directory, composed of our most qualified leading figures from the industrial and financial world." And one must believe that the mayors of the Palace had succeeded, by November 1940, in making Leopold III take up again the bastard and anti-political formula of this technical "Directory" of which he had often dreamed: a simple agent of execution, placed under the thumb of the royal Cabinet, at last sole master of the State.

General Van Overstraeten's note is categorical on this subject, even if, as is quite possible, it was only drafted much later, when it was a matter of getting the Sovereign out of difficulty.

One thing in any case is certain: to the precise question put to him by Hitler — "If you had to re-establish a government in Belgium, which personalities are you thinking of calling upon?" — the King answered with these words: "For example, Mr. Lippens, Mr. Devèze..."

Hitler looked at Leopold III with such astonishment that the latter, caught short, realizing the stupefaction into which he had just put his host, did not finish his sentence.

For Hitler, the problem was to know who — Degrelle, de Man, someone from the V.N.V. — could be the polarizing element of a royal combination. And here Leopold III, when questioned, was first citing two names from the old regime, of whom there had been no question until then and of whom the Chancellery knew almost nothing.

Hitler did not want to impose ministers on King Leopold. But while the intransigence of the Flemish nationalists was already proving insurmountable, Leopold III had just complicated matters still further by proposing as leading figures two conservative Freemasons, survivors of bygone times!

I believe, certainly, that I would have managed to clear Lippens and Devèze with Hitler, for the King was attached to their resurrection. However, it would have been with the deliberate intention of neutralizing these two men, of considering them only as liaison agents and complementary technicians, like the Hugenbergs or the Schachts. But it was extravagant to propose them as leaders on such an occasion.

Hitler, taken aback, fixed upon the King his eyes charged with fluid. There was a silence. Then Hitler resumed his monologue, speaking of something else, explaining at length his European conception of the New Order.

Long afterward, the witness from whom I have this account was still shaking his head as he told me of this scene. Twenty words had sufficed to give the coup de grâce to the hopes King Leopold had nourished since June concerning the recovery of Belgium.

Leopold III, petrified by Hitler's gaze, had gone no further. The incident gave the Germans the impression that the Sovereign did not know what he wanted. They knew that he had been frightened at the end of May at the thought of an interview with the Führer. They remembered the persistence with which, for many weeks, he had solicited the interview finally granted to him. They imagined that his candidates of August and September — de Man and me — had retained his favor. They did not understand.

Hitler had received the King very amiably, with great consideration. Leopold III, for his part, had shown himself desirous of pleasing, even too deferential, according to the witnesses.

The King is by nature timid. During the interminable interview, he seemed withdrawn, speaking in a pale voice. Hitler, robust, calm, barely leaving his interlocutor the chance to open his mouth, had strongly impressed the King's mind, and this cut him off from a good part of his faculties.

At no moment did Hitler try to exert the least pressure on his visitor. The fears the King had expressed at the end of May of being treated like Chancellor Schuschnigg proved absolutely chimerical. Occupying all Belgian territory, having interned the army and the King himself, why would Hitler have been violent? He held everything. He could afford the luxury of being amiable and courteous.

But Leopold III seemed to him weak, colorless, lacking decisiveness, sympathetic but overwhelmed by events and also by failures of temperament. At Berchtesgaden it was not like Laeken: Baron Frédéricq and General Van Overstraeten — the omnipotent mentor and the clandestine dictator — were not in the prompter's box or behind the scenes.

Hitler had envisaged, at the end of May and in September 1940 — before Montoire — a complete solution to the problem of Belgian space. The two projects having gone up in smoke, he was not a man to envisage settlements of detail. King Leopold obtained absolutely nothing, not even that the Reich put an end to the scandalous discrimination that existed between Belgian prisoners of Flemish origin and Belgian prisoners of Walloon origin, a demagogic platform offered to the V.N.V. by devious Berliners.

The fact that, even in this, Leopold III obtained nothing from the Führer only confirms what I later learned from the best sources: that Hitler was disappointed by the man.

Before seeing him, the Führer was still disposed to help him. He had been amiable toward him in the preceding months, despite the reasons he had to bear him a grudge. Hitler, victorious, had wiped the slate clean. He had even given the necessary orders himself to facilitate the return of the royal children who had taken refuge in Spain, at San Sebastián.

But the Berchtesgaden interview was fatal. The head of the Reich had a personality that crushed. King Leopold had retained from the hard education King Albert had given him an extraordinary timidity. He immediately lost his means in Hitler's presence, unable to resist the mysterious radiance that emanated from him. Mussolini himself let himself be dominated by the Führer, who was nevertheless extremely cordial with him. He emerged each time from their interviews electrified and disconcerted.

Leopold III had come to Berchtesgaden under very bad conditions. There he was only the shadow of himself, unseated from the beginning of the conversation.

The abortive allusion he risked concerning the new government or the "Directory" he wished to create

was so timid, so clumsy, that it definitively made him lose his composure.

Leopold III departed having made a mediocre impression on Hitler. All his hopes evaporated, he returned to Brussels completely empty-handed. His journey earned him a cup of tea — a pretty cup with a swastika — before an impressive landscape.

That was all. Strictly all. All for the moment. For in 1945, he was going to pay dearly for that cup of tea...

XXIII

MONTOIRE

France's responsibilities in 1940. - The Pétain case and the Leopold III case. - The unity of the French. - The exclusiveness of their patriotism. - The absence of French interest in Europe. - Drieu La Rochelle. - Fabre-Luce. - Robert Brasillach. - Vichy and the Marshal. - Pierre Laval, patriot. - Admiral Darlan. - Solidarity of the French genius and the German genius. - Fernand de Brinon. - The marvelous French suppleness. - The Doriot mystery. - France and Belgium.

The very autumn that saw the collapse of Leopold III's plans and the possibilities of Belgian-German collaboration had seen the sudden sealing of the Pétain-Hitler reconciliation and the beginning of a surprising and audacious rapprochement between the French State and the Reich: less than fourteen months after Daladier's declaration of war, four months after the Wehrmacht's crushing victory over the dislocated armies of Generalissimo Weygand.

People always speak, with tremolos, of German invasions of French territory. That is quickly said. If Paris was invaded in 1814 and 1815, it is because for twenty years France — that of the Republic as well as that of Napoleon — had invaded Germany, raiding, breaking up, and annexing indiscriminately. From Leipzig to Montmirail and Waterloo, Blücher did nothing but conduct unwanted travelers back home. That is all.

Likewise, if Bismarck's divisions strolled as far as the Loire in 1871, it was because, in 1870, Napoleon III, an incorrigible warmonger, had dreamed, by declaring war on the King of Prussia, of watering his horses in the Rhine.

Apart from the invasion of 1914, all invasions of France were the counterblow of French wars.

Long before the Republic, the Capetian monarchy had already galloped with vigor over the lands of the Reich. The devastation of the Palatinate was the work not of the Gestapo, but of Louis XIV.

Over five centuries, France has invaded all Europe, through imperialism and pride. That is a fact all the same! So one must be a good sport and not cry rape as soon as one retreats.

On June 13, 1940, France was ill placed to be scandalized by the Wehrmacht's entry into Paris. On the previous September 3, she had declared against the Reich a war that Hitler indisputably did not want, having directed his whole effort of expansion toward the East and not toward the West.

Germany would by far have preferred to have peace with France than to beat France. This concord

would have been preferable for everyone, for the French of 1945 as much as for the Germans of 1940.

If Daladier, an elementary mind stupefied by Pernod, had not on September 3, 1939, obeyed the injunctions of English imperialism, anxious to weaken a competitor, Europe would not have known that frightful mêlée from which it emerged almost dead, the victors almost as badly off as the vanquished.

Germany should normally, in October 1940, have shown sharp resentment toward France, which had dragged her into a second world war — a very high price for a Polish campaign that, without that, would have been definitively settled in about twenty days.

Belgium, for her part, did not declare war on the Reich. Her soil was invaded on May 10, 1940; several thousand of her sons fell. Once again, Belgium was the victim of the appetites, furies, and propaganda of her neighbors. Once defeated, she could have expected to be treated with more consideration than France.

But politics and morality are not always twin sisters. Leopold III returned as Gros-Jean as before from his Berchtesgaden interview, solicited seven times, whereas Marshal Pétain, who had asked for nothing and who nevertheless represented an aggressor country, met Hitler on his own territory, was showered by him with attentions, and was received by the Wehrmacht standing at attention.

The Belgians had first of all to blame themselves if the French alone suddenly benefited from a complete change of destiny.

Leopold III, through his own fault, had missed his Brussels Montoire on May 30, 1940. The French Marshal might also have grown nervous: aged eighty-four, sustained by daily massages, he came as a calm Fleming of Artois whom nothing astonished. He shook Hitler's hand as an equal. Hitler felt the ascendancy of this white-haired old man, with Germanic blue eyes and a step that remained so firm.

Belgium was served badly, secondly, by her internal struggles. Hitler wanted to see me long before he saw Laval and Pétain. But the unfortunate trips laid by the V.N.V. made the operation fail.

In politics, the wheel turns quickly. Opportunity passed twice under our noses. Both times, fearful or divided, we let it escape.

The French, unlike the Belgians, were united in 1940, as they always are united in the hour of reverses or danger. French patriotism is an admirable thing: it eliminates competitions and puts the national interest before everything when that interest is dangerously called into question.

In the summer of 1940, the French parliamentarians, almost unanimously, voted full powers to Pétain: the fiercest democrats had rallied to dictatorship; the Freemasons had voted for a team of Catholics; the young for an old man; the antimilitarists for a marshal. Every French house displayed Pétain's portrait.

This people has many defects, but it also has marvelous qualities: one of the most striking is its vibrant concern for the fatherland.

If Pétain went to see the Führer at Montoire, if France entered upon the path of collaboration, it was not through Germanophilia, but through patriotism, and only through patriotism.

In foreign policy, no other feeling will ever animate a Frenchman. I do not even believe in a French communism capable of working against France in the real and exclusive interest of a foreign country. A Frenchman is first of all a Frenchman, whether he is of the extreme right or the extreme left. He did not love the Germans in 1940, still less the Italians. Since then he has managed to love neither the English, nor the Russians, nor the Americans; he would let them all drown without displeasure in the Caribbean Gulf, the Saint George's Channel, the Baltic Sea, or the Black Sea. The foreigner seems intelligent to him only if he imitates France or at least admires it. Otherwise, he is a savage, a scribbler, a clod, a fool, an Ostrogoth. One couples with him if it is indispensable, but one knows what he is worth!

Defeated France of 1940 was no exception to this rule.

I remember, in this connection, my first meeting with Laval. Knowing that I was passing through Paris, he had come to visit me at my small hotel.

We had scarcely been speaking for five minutes when this man, who had never seen me and who did not know the state of my relations with the Reich, made me this clear and sharp declaration: "Within thirty years we shall have our revenge!"

Revenge! The only Frenchman who spoke to me in 1940 of revenge was Pierre Laval, represented since then as the worst of traitors! In France there are rarely traitors. There are men who have different conceptions of service to their country. But it is always France, before everything, that they are thinking of, often becoming carried away, sometimes mistaken, but all faithful patriots.

In 1940, the No. 1 collaborationist, the man who led Pétain by the hand to Montoire, Laval, looked with joy at the Germans growing numb in the delights of Paris: "They will soften and corrupt themselves here," he repeated to me. "Within thirty years our turn will come!"

In reality, Laval did not know the Germans. Like a true Frenchman, he knew nothing outside France. He, who had been a minister in Paris fourteen times, had never visited Brussels! He had just crossed southern Belgium one night, by train, through Liège and Charleroi, when he had gone at Chancellor Brüning's invitation. Apart from that, nothing. He lived three hours by automobile from Belgium: he had never felt the temptation to know it.

And he was not a grocer from the Batignolles or a wine merchant from Montparnasse; he was a famous lawyer, an important political man. Belgium was Paris's nearest neighbor, an ally of the Great War, a big customer, and, on top of that, an exceptional center of art. No matter: Laval had never set foot there. In this he was strictly the hundred percent Frenchman, for whom everything not French never has more than an accidental interest: momentary alliances, commercial treaties, condescending fanfares. But no curiosity is mixed in. Why be curious if one is convinced that everything one has at home is better than what is found elsewhere?

When Laval committed himself to the path of collaboration, he did not see this problem as a European in 1940. France is the last country that will understand the necessity of Europe. And even if it admits it one day, it will be with the idea of using it personally to raise itself up again and to dominate. Laval the collaborator was a Laval who was solely French, happy to see Germany treat France with consideration, make concessions, wipe the slate clean, but in no way following the Third Reich, except in words, in its work of cooperation.

Germany, installed in the heart of Europe, naturally has a continental vocation. Its radiance identifies

itself with the continental territory. France is, geographically, a peninsula cast at the western extremity of the continent, a peninsula looking toward America and Africa, linked to the other parts of the world by a colonial empire that distracts its energies from the European field of action. Because of her past, a tomb of pride that isolates her, because of the eccentric situation of her territory, France will never voluntarily be "continental."

The Germany of 1940 showed a famous dose of naïveté when it imagined embarking France, the very first, on the ship Europe. A Belgian, a Dutchman, a Dane can become convinced Europeans; a Swiss too, even a Hungarian or a Croat. A Frenchman will never go beyond the reactions of nationalism with blue, white, and red blood cells, the fundamental elements of his existence.

A few exceptional young writers, such as Robert Brasillach, stocky, with warm eyes and a round olive-colored face, or Drieu La Rochelle, gangling, consumed, with a style clean and pure like a Greek morning, or Fabre-Luce, an observer as lucid as a surgeon, saw a little beyond the French phenomenon. We would meet in the picturesque turmoil of the time at the bar, in the restaurant, among clusters of pretty girls, or on the terrace of Fouquet's, which divine women cyclists approached with suppleness, their legs dazzling like long rays of sun.

But even a Drieu La Rochelle kept the distance of the French genius. Fabre-Luce might travel part of the way with the occupier; but as soon as he saw, in 1942, that the Reich's victory was becoming doubtful and that collaboration presented less interest for France, he would immediately jump off the train, according to his amusing expression. Yet they were the outstanding figures of the young collaboration.

I obviously cannot place on the same line of combat as these luminous, upright intellectuals, an honor to the French mind, the rabble of pen-servants such as Bunau-Varilla, owner of Le Matin, raising his glass before the Germans to the glory of Hitler one month after the latter had defeated France; or such as Georges Suarez, a venal dealer in articles, hawking his copy at auction as if he were selling tubes of toothpaste or razor blades at a bargain-store counter.

The Drieu La Rochelles, the Fabre-Luces, the Robert Brasillachs glimpsed Europe by moments, but above all they vibrated as Frenchmen.

Having acted and reacted only as patriots, none of them thought of leaving Paris when the Wehrmacht flowed back. Poor and noble Drieu, savagely hunted, committed suicide. Fabre-Luce, arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 after he had "jumped off the train," was arrested by de Gaulle in 1944. Robert Brasillach, dear and sensitive Robert Brasillach, was shot on February 6, 1945, with a blue-white-red tie at his neck, a last salute to his fatherland.

He too had lived only to illuminate the future roads of France. Taken prisoner at the Maginot Line and sent to a camp in the Reich, he was very badly regarded at the Embassy in the autumn of 1940. I had to insist a great deal with Abetz to have him freed.

He was condemned to death in the great panic aroused by the so-called von Rundstedt offensive at Christmas 1944. In prison he had written admirable poems, discreet and heartrending in their humanity and sensibility. But what do poems matter to barbarians? Yet those poems alone constituted a pathetic justification. How could such a soul, so pure, so serene, so fraternal, have betrayed?

The official world of Vichy and Paris was as reserved as the Fabre-Luces and Drieus. Marshal Pétain

was too old to abandon a strictly nationalist mentality, nourished on memories of the war of 1870 and passed through the fire of Verdun.

He collaborated with the Reich because it was in the French interest, but he never fraternized. The crowd supported him for a very long time because it instinctively sensed the depth of his reservations.

Moreover, despite the legend spread by official propaganda, the Marshal was old, very old. A contemporary of Lamartine, Musset, Cavour, and Metternich, he could have been my great-grandfather. In the history of Vichy, he was a solemn screen rather than an executor and initiator.

Every day he was given massages — some said injections — which made him spry and lively for a few hours. Then until the next day he would fall back into a fog where everything became tangled.

Noble, disinterested, but outstripped by the years, the Marshal could only be at the mercy of an entourage that shut him in, doped him, flattered his little manias, wrung decisions or annulments from him, made him launch anathemas in every direction, open the Riom trial, close it, drive Laval away, recall him. Once massaged, he could hold up very correctly, his mind clear, even incisive, for two or three hours, as at his interview with Hitler. Afterward he was a toy.

Power at Vichy was shared between the Marshal's cabinet, sabotaging and very influential — the Maréchale herself being a very imperious dogaressa — and the Prime Minister of the moment, whether Laval or Darlan. The most collaborationist of all was Admiral Darlan, beyond any possible dispute.

Laval, shrewd, pliant, charming, slid along, passed through the cat door, avoided traps, made skillful recoveries, and made difficulties disappear by means of a smile. He was the most skillful statesman of the whole war. He obtained much and gave up little. Without him, France would certainly have had to supply two million more workers to the Reich's factories. His work was not easy. He was a dazzling conjurer, arriving late at recognition of the necessity of a European policy, but always French, to the marrow of his bones.

That he was judged in Paris in October 1945 in the atmosphere of a club of the Terror, and that he was shot, already three-quarters dead — with radio broadcast of the volley and his last gasp! — changes nothing about the fact: Laval was a Frenchman, a true Frenchman, a very great Frenchman, who, in order partially to relieve France of the burden of defeat and occupation, accomplished prodigies of skill and intelligence. He had a lively, sparkling intelligence, but always good-natured. Laval was simplicity itself. There was nothing fanatical or hard in him. On the contrary, he was sensitive and affectionate. I knew him well. I saw him at length. I was the only one to be received at his home, in the intimacy of his voluntary isolation, at Sigmaringen at the end of the war. His whole being vibrated with intelligence, kindness, and charm, a charm born of his warm and gentle eyes and the mischievous crease of his lips.

But above all, he loved his country. It is true. That is how it was. He was killed out of hatred — and also out of envy, for he was a thousand times superior to his adversaries — without even being allowed to explain himself, as if patriotism did not include a thousand nuances, a thousand different and sometimes totally opposed tremors! A brutal age, when souls were required to be drawn summarily, in black and white, like targets at a fairground shooting gallery!

Admiral Darlan did not replace Laval because he was Germanophobic, but only because a Vichy clan claimed to use him to eliminate Laval, a particularly capable nuisance. It was an obscure palace drama,

such as all regencies of children and old men have known.

Darlan made many more concessions to the Germans than his sly predecessor and successor. He had neither Laval's political instinct, nor his flexibility, nor his suavitas. After being received by Hitler, he ceded to the Luftwaffe the use of the Aleppo airfield in Syria, thereby giving the English the opportunity to mount the scenario that would see France expelled from the Levant. Darlan also offered the Kriegsmarine the use of three ports in North Africa. He even signed, on April 25, 1942, a protocol — not ratified by Pétain — by which he placed the ports of Bizerte and Dakar, the Tunis-Gabès railway line, and the chartering by the Reich of the French merchant marine at the Germans' disposal.

But, no more than Laval, did Admiral Darlan yield for pleasure. The proof is that in November 1942 he opened the doors of Algeria to the Americans, disavowed by Pétain, but in collusion with him, as Ambassador Scapini explained to me six weeks later — blind from the war, more French than anyone and yet himself also a "collaborator."

These people were trying to pull France out of the ditch into which the ignorant or insane politicians of before June 1940 had thrown her. Even those who, like Laval in 1943, desired Germany's victory desired it only for the good of France.

And events have not proved them wrong. In a Europe federated thanks to the armies of the Reich, France could have played an eminent role: her intelligence, piercing like light; her sensibility, so divinely balanced; her innate sense of the exact, the simple, the reasonable, would have assured her a domination of the highest quality. In one generation, all Europe, including the German Reich, would have received the mark — and the benefit — of French spirituality.

The Allied victory of 1945, the victory of America and Asia, left, within a beaten Europe, an atrophied, demoralized France, a weak lamp that scarcely radiates any longer.

What influence can France now have on a world spiritually flattened by the two victorious blocs? On a hermetic U.S.S.R., with frontiers like strongbox doors that will open again only for disasters? Or on the fabulous United States of America, despotically perched on its heaps of gold, master of everything — atomic weapons, military bases, communications, raw materials, world markets, propaganda — for whom France is no more than a faded flower on the old, half-collapsed European wall?

The "German man" was a thousand times closer to the "French man" than the Yankee businessman or the Moscow Kyrgyz. Laval was one of the rare Frenchmen who understood — only toward the end of the war — that the German genius and the French genius would be saved together or perish together, and that their destinies, henceforth, were in any case united.

If France and Germany revive one day, they will be able to raise themselves again only by complementing one another, by transfusing what remains of their life. That will be their last chance, assuming that chance still exists.

The most active agent of collaboration in Paris was Ambassador Fernand de Brinon, who before the war of 1939 had traveled a great deal in Germany. He represented Marshal Pétain with the occupation authorities. Curious thing: the wife of this diplomat, in constant contact with the highest National Socialist dignitaries, was Jewish.

Brinon had a long tapir's nose, a fresh complexion, a young and amused gaze. He was concerned to

maintain his sportiness, had himself massaged every day, and devoted himself to strange athletic exercises, dressed in thick pullovers like those worn by jockeys who jog in the Bois in the morning in order to lose weight.

The New Order had earned him a dazzling uniform that gave him the air of an admiral on land. He was a man of perfect education, extremely obliging, an amusing storyteller, not a bluffer, always courageous: he died very bravely in 1947, ravaged by two years in a cell, going of his own accord, leaning on his cane, to stand before the firing squad, which he watched silently and firmly until the instant of the burst.

The situation of Marshal Pétain's personal delegate was never easy: on one side the Germans, often demanding and quickly irritated; on the other, the zoological garden of Vichy: bungling émigrés, dizzying the old lion who had become blind; rats of politico-finance on the lookout for secret nibblings; Gaullist adherents; Anglo-American hangers-on padded with dollars; sly sacristy weasels plotting from hotel to hotel; sea fish, freshwater fish, not forgetting a shrill lot of court woodcocks and dissatisfied old virgins long macerated in acid.

Isolated in Paris, Brinon had to represent with honor, even sometimes with pomp, this shapeless Vichy pâté from which emerged Darlan's flat képi or the shiny hair, like a rook's wing, of Pierre Laval.

That these three men, in such a mess, despite such a mess, were able to have themselves taken seriously by the Third Reich and to undertake an audacious and relatively fruitful policy of collaboration is one more testimony to the "French miracle." A band of old monkeys behind the three of them uttered inarticulate cries, cut their suspenders, pulled at the seat of their trousers, threw tomatoes at the noses of their German interlocutors, and Laval, Darlan, and Brinon continued to face matters, impassive as the Zouave of the Alma!

They were strong. They were very strong. Four months had sufficed for Laval and Brinon to reverse completely their country's situation and to bring together at Montoire, as equals, the vanquished and the victor, Pétain and Hitler.

Four years of tragedies, comedies, and melodramas succeeded one another at Vichy. Darlan went over to the Americans at the end of 1942. Laval, in August 1944, refused to remain in office outside French soil. Brinon's little troupe, divided, gossiping, sterile, was nevertheless treated in Germany as no foreign government was: it had an imperial château set marvelously above the Danube, enjoyed complete extraterritorial rights, and received four times more ration cards than the German refugees, themselves crowded miserably by the millions into the ruined Reich.

In the autumn of 1940, only a few isolated individuals had made with Abetz the contacts that permitted the dramatic stroke of Montoire.

The activity of the parties that, before the war, were more or less tinged with National Socialism seemed nonexistent.

Colonel Casimir de la Rocque, like most soldiers who stray into politics, lacked flair and the sense of crowds. He was a dabbler and a fool.

Doriot, for his part, had pushed with his elbows vigorously. From July 4, abandoning his unit, he had rushed to Paris. The Germans received him badly. They never esteemed him. Nor did Mussolini, who,

as early as 1936, had spoken to me of him with stinging contempt. Disappointed, Doriot ran to Vichy, since he could not be the man of Paris. There he plotted and found the source of secret funds. A few months later he was found again in the capital as the man-of-all-work of Adrien Marquet, Minister of the Interior. I saw Doriot at that time. He himself told me that the newspaper he was launching, Le Cri du Peuple, was financed by Marquet. This newspaper was a total failure.

At the same period, Doriot wrote a pamphlet entitled: I Am a Man of the Marshal. As the price of his services, he hoped to receive a portfolio from Pétain. But if Vichy used his party, Vichy kept him personally in quarantine. When he noticed that this method was yielding nothing, he imagined having himself imposed on Vichy by the Germans, and he began his approaches to Abetz.

After many efforts, Doriot managed to get himself invited to the rue de Lille. It was a Tout-Paris evening: very excited actresses, great friends of Otto Abetz, who addressed them familiarly; the cream of the nobility; Sacha Guitry monumentalizing himself with conviction and majesty; the literary world streaming with servility.

Doriot was in the heap, bulky as a public-services truck. He approached Abetz, who thought he recognized in him a boxer received in a previous batch. Good Otto launched into an eloquent tirade on the history of boxing, asking him whether he was satisfied with his latest fights. Doriot, sick with fury, did not know whether the Ambassador, innocent as an angel, was making fun of him. He did not dare react. Abetz was still quite embarrassed by it years later when he told the story of this mistake.

Only in 1941 did the German embassy decide to take Doriot in charge, pay for the blue shirts, the red ties, and the rest — especially the rest — but it was careful not to impose Doriot on Vichy, as he desired.

Doriot thought that the German police would be more effective than Otto Abetz, and in 1944 he passed over to the Gestapo side. A British low-flying plane settled his account on a road in southern Germany in February 1945.

Of all French collaboration, he was no doubt the least interesting man. One would still have to be sure that he was not a simulator. I have always wondered whether he was not playing a double game. Like Vlasov — they had striking points of resemblance — he still smelled of Moscow through and through. Physically, he put my whole being on alert.

In front of Vlasov I had had the same reaction, and I was sure I was not mistaken. Twenty times I had warned the Germans on this subject. Their blind confidence cost them the stab in the back they received in Prague at the beginning of May 1945.

In any case, without serious and experienced political parties to support her; directed by a soldier who reached puberty, more or less, under Napoleon III; possessing at Vichy hardly any ruling elite other than a handful of flatterers and bunglers, almost all decayed, socially a century behind, neophobic, chatterers, plotters; delivered to the efforts, endlessly sabotaged, of Laval or Darlan; represented in Paris by Brinon alone, isolated like a méhari in the Sahara — defeated France was nevertheless so skillful that it achieved the tour de force of winning Hitler's favor as early as October 1940. Belgium, by contrast, directed by a young king of German race, provided with two great New Order parties capable of dynamically supporting a policy of collaboration, able, with Henri de Man, to count on the mass of members of the former Socialist Party, remained on a siding.

But old Pétain and his croaking court of doubtful graybeards were, in 1940, supported by the unanimity of the French.

Pétain's collaborationist patrols comprised only a few men. But no politician, of left or right, would then have hindered them in their task, whether they were called Marquet, Brinon, Bergery, or Laval. French patriotism operated at full efficiency.

France had only one chance: she seized it. Belgium had ten chances: she lost them.

And while France once again appeared as a precursor, keeping the secret support of Churchill and Roosevelt but neutralizing by means of realistic collaboration the disaster of June 1940, Belgium lived in chaos. Incapable of gathering her energies, she entered into an icy, penetrating fog, thick as a winter night.

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XXIV

IN THE NEW EUROPE

The “collaborator” Pétain. — The Pope, admirer of the Marshal. — Collaboration, a patriotic duty? — Patriotism, a question of conscience and not of material success. — Belgium adrift. — Hitler’s adaptation to his European mission. — Hitler and Napoleon. — Europe, a grandiose dream. — Possibilities opened to Belgium within a united Europe. — To be in place in time. — Not to lose one’s personality. — The Europe of fatherlands. — The strength and pride of our nationalism.

Although collaboration with France had been for Germany only a succession of abandonments and traps, Germany, imprudently committed and unwilling to suffer a loss of prestige by openly reversing itself, maintained toward the defeated of June 1940 a policy oriented toward understanding.

Hitler, Ribbentrop, and Abetz remained faithful to Laval from one regime to another, without Laval, always correct with them, going further than correctness. Admiral Darlan, invited to Hitler’s, imposed by the Germans upon the friendship of Ciano, who had to run to Turin to receive him, went over to the Americans the very week of the landing in North Africa. General Juin, a prisoner freed by Hitler, duped the Reich with equal enthusiasm. Almost without exception, the official representatives of French collaboration had no other objective than to fool the Germans.

They lost ground only when they fought among themselves, or when, like Doriot and Bucard, they had themselves supported by police clans whose prey or agents provocateurs they became.

Taken as a whole, the French collaborationists brought Germany little: four times fewer workers, proportionally, than the non-collaborationist Belgian state; and, until the autumn of 1944, twelve times fewer volunteers for the Eastern Front — still proportionally — than the Flemish and Walloon legions. Collaboration in no way prevented the Marshal from long enjoying the consideration of foreign countries. Long after Montoire, after the famous photograph, published throughout the world, of Pétain shaking the Führer’s hand, Pope Pius XII spoke with emotion of the “Pétain miracle.” His Holiness’s nuncio proclaimed to the Marshal, in the name of the diplomatic corps: “You are a providential man!”

Months after the launching of collaboration, Admiral Leahy, ambassador of the United States, publicly described Marshal Pétain as a “national hero.” In 1945, Pétain, half deaf, sleeping soundly in his chair two steps from his accusers, was trampled under the partisan fury of the French. England and America did not approve these excesses. They judged that the condemnation of a glorious, honest nonagenarian who had sacrificed himself for his country constituted an ignominy. Indeed, it took the bloody-minded fanaticism of stupid crowds, hatred maintained by the profiteers of the resistance, and the spirit of racial vengeance for the mere fact of having “collaborated” to be automatically considered a crime after the war. The “collaboration” of men responsible for the conduct of a country is perfectly legitimate; it is admitted and regulated by the Hague Convention; it can be the manifestation of high patriotism and show more courage than the flight abroad of those who abandon their public functions.

A Huysmans, burgomaster of Antwerp, fleeing to London without any valid reason, solely because he was afraid (“I prefer a living Huysmans to a dead Huysmans”), failed in his duties, which did not prevent him, in 1946, from becoming prime minister. The alderman who had to replace this runaway on short notice showed, by taking on a difficult succession, obvious civic spirit, but he was prosecuted in 1945.

Without the presence and labor of the senior Belgian and French officials of 1940–1944, dishonored in 1945 or thrown, with shaved heads, into dungeons, millions of human beings would have drifted in full anarchy. It was obviously more comfortable to put out to sea. “The healthiest thing in a fight,” says a Béarn proverb, “is to let it pass!”

Had London succumbed, these fugitives would have been richly housed in the United States or Canada, becoming bankers, university professors, presidents of Jewish committees. Their rear was secure; they risked nothing. But the millions of Belgians, the millions of Frenchmen thrown by a stupid war into the most frightful muddle — who was going to look after them? Who was going to fight step by step to induce the occupier to apply to them a reasonable regime, to assure them better supplies, and to try to limit the dispatch of workers to the Reich?

Who was going to apply himself patiently, painfully, ardently to defending Belgium’s and France’s rights to life in a Europe of which Spaak thought Germany was “mistress for a thousand years”?

The more one believed in an imminent outcome of the war to the Reich’s advantage, the more one had to attempt everything, desperately, to prevent one’s country from perishing. It goes without saying that the anti-collaborationist attitude was also justifiable. One could, in fact, doubt German victory, although in 1940, to tell the truth, almost no one doubted it.

In one case as in the other, the only thing that counts is motives. One can be mistaken tactically, for war is almost always a lottery. But victory or defeat changes nothing in the nature of intentions. One can show nobility by collaborating, baseness by resisting.

A “collaborator” may have been an irreproachable patriot if he collaborated to assure the salvation and rebirth of his country in a Europe he believed Germany would henceforth direct for centuries. A “resister” may have been a contemptible bad citizen if he went to London only from personal interest, from calculation, to escape his responsibilities.

Ideological passions have helped make patriotism a question of pure chance. But patriotism is a question of conscience.

A patriot is the man who risks everything for his country, even if one day the facts refute his forecasts.

A traitor is the man who plays his country's fate according only to the law of his selfish interests, who uses it instead of serving it, and it matters little then that he placed his bet on the winning square.

Pierlot and Spaak, offering themselves shamelessly first to the Germans and then to the English, driven solely by their ambition, were indisputably, in 1940, and in both cases, traitors.

To reduce patriotism to a question of luck, to stake it on the material success of tanks and bombers, is to prostitute it. It is to make the service of the country a poker game, delivered to the sole caprice of chance.

In fact, and provisionally at least, we "collaborators" lost. We gave ourselves passionately to our prostrate fatherland and risked everything for it, at the hour when so many swaggerers, today swollen with patriotic self-importance, were scurrying toward London, their trousers soiled and their faces green.

Collaboration, at the end of 1940, was a necessity for Belgians, much more than for the French. France, indeed, thanks to the meeting at Montoire, had seen its international position stabilize. Belgium, for its part, was sinking deeper and deeper into stagnation and darkness.

Hitler had ordered the foreign diplomatic missions to leave Brussels. This measure was motivated, it has been explained, by the fear that some of these offices might be converted into spy bureaus. But these departures left us in the bitterness of solitude, of slow disintegration, of growing isolation. The King's failure at Berchtesgaden was not made to calm the anxiety that plowed through our minds.

No government. No more diplomatic representation. A frontier shifting like the sea: in the east of the country, customs posts moved from week to week, without explanation, absorbing farms, castles, villages, Belgian the day before, German the next day. We no longer existed as a country; we were only an occupied space.

At that moment — let it not be forgotten — the majority of Belgians firmly believed either in a German-English arrangement or in the total victory of the Reich. Everything had to be attempted to clarify our country's future. How could one see clearly, how could one defend oneself, without attracting Hitler's confidence and without convincing him to grant our people its chances in the Europe coming into being?

Hitler had not pronounced on the "Belgian case." We were under a regime of occupation, that was all. The future remained obscure, but it remained free. We were neither absorbed nor condemned. The case could be won. It was only a matter of faith, work, tenacity, and intelligence.

Hitler had adapted himself with promptness and lucidity to a European role that no German foresaw in August 1939.

The extreme moderation with which he had settled the question of the French armistice, and the still more remarkable moderation with which he had, at Montoire, wiped away the resentments of the previous day, proved that, having reached the apogee of power, he mastered it instead of letting himself become intoxicated by it. Even in Belgium, where the Pierlots expected ("the most favorable hypothesis") a Gauleiter, his moderation had astonished.

Hitler has often been depicted as a man in a frenzy because he has been seen, in the cinema, throwing himself about at his meetings, subjugated by the mysterious forces of eloquence. But the Hitler of solitude was a calm, meditative man, lingering for hours before the snowy chains of Tyrol or under the firs of his headquarters on the Lithuanian frontier. He was perfectly accessible to arguments conducted with precision and vigor. This man was simple, moderate, conciliatory with those he esteemed and who approached him frankly. I was convinced in 1940, and I have always been convinced since, that with him the solutions of wisdom, enlightened by the laws of History, would have prevailed once the war was over, and would have assured the balance of Europe. A Europe of which Germany would be the dynamic, federating element, but where each community would find the possibility of fitting in without suffocating its genius, without denying its personality.

Hitler — History will say it when the furious passions of our time have calmed — was the greatest statesman Europe has ever known. He was more stripped down, more open to the Universal than Napoleon, who was more a conquering Frenchman, a builder of empires, than a true European.

Hitler, in this a man of his time, and his hand extended to Pétain proved it, dreamed of a just, serious, definitive Europe, unified on the initiative of the victor, but where each ethnic group could flourish according to its merits and in proportion to its work.

Just as a Bismarck had known how to go beyond his quality as a Prussian in order to become German, so Hitler quickly went from the German and the Germanic man that he was to the European he carried within himself. Early freed from narrowly imperialist ambitions, creating a Europe of which Germany would be the fundamental element, in the image of Prussia in the Bismarckian Reich, he began without effort to think as a European. The Bavarians, the Saxons, the Rhinelanders did not become Prussians in 1871, after the proclamation of the Empire at Versailles, but all of them, with the Prussians themselves, became conscious of their community as Germans.

Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Danes, Norwegians, Romanians would, in the same way, have become conscious of their vocation as Europeans. Having reached the higher stage of their evolution, these old peoples, slowly gathered, from Hugh Capet to Frederick the Great and Cavour, within some twenty rival states, were at last going to federate, thanks to the continental order established by Hitler, within a vast, powerful European community, an instrument of rationalization and emulation, not of oppression.

If some of the Führer’s collaborators were sometimes still short-sighted pan-Germanists, Hitler himself had the genius, the balance, the absence of prejudices, the panoramic view indispensable to bringing this gigantic work to completion. He possessed an authority unique in the history of the continent. His success would have stabilized the strength, wealth, and civilization of Europe for centuries, probably forever.

With that great dream broken, it is quite possible that Europe has lost its last chance. In 1945, our countries found themselves not only weakened, but more hateful than ever, more irreducibly divided into rival blocs, while the other parts of the world were consolidating their political and economic unity.

The only unity spoken of in 1940, that of Europe, is in the end the only one that was not realized.

But it will be understood that this project could haunt millions of young beings, attracted by what was grand and reasonable.

Hitler represented for many of us the possibility of finally soldering together the scattered members of Europe. That is why, after the collapse of 1940, not lingering to groan sterilely over conflicts that were over, we gave our faith to the man who, rising above outmoded nationalisms, wished to build the great haven where several hundred million men, understanding one another, intelligently and disciplinedly adapting their efforts, eliminating the barriers of a petty past, working fraternally according to an overall plan, would have constituted the richest, noblest, and most radiant spiritual center on earth.

For Belgians, perhaps more than for anyone, European unity would have opened extraordinary possibilities.

Flemings and Walloons have always shown, throughout History, a prodigious facility for rubbing shoulders with their neighbors without thereby losing their characteristics. They have undergone twenty invasions and have been deformed by none. Placed at a marvelous confluence of rivers and roads, they have always been a land of meeting, of material and intellectual exchanges, where Dürer and Victor Hugo, Louis XI and Metternich, lived as comfortably as one another.

The Belgian accommodates himself to everything, triumphs over everything, skillful, a hard worker, a bon vivant, unceremonious, joyful, and generous. He does not have the pride and vanity complexes of the great peoples. He has seen them, listened to them, compared them for centuries. He has assimilated the best of one and another. Inhabiting a land between two worlds, he possesses exactly the psychology, the temperament needed to adapt himself to everything and to cement scattered elements. In a united Europe, one would have seen, after thirty years, Walloons and Flemings everywhere occupying positions of the first rank.

The new Europe did not frighten us. To fear it would have been to doubt the enterprising, supple, and tenacious genius of our people.

Of course, it was important not to be submerged before the continental work was ready.

Hitler’s European plan represented salvation for us, salvation for all. But it was indispensable to make our voice heard in time, to recall the memorable assets of our glorious Low Countries, the qualities of our compatriots, their very special predispositions for the work of rapprochement and understanding of which the Führer dreamed. It was also essential not to let the proper virtues of our people grow thin, strongly impressed as they were by the triumph of the Reich in 1940 and too ready to lose their own personality.

During those months of uncertainty — but also of hope — in the winter of 1940–1941, I directed all my efforts toward a double goal. The first aimed to affirm our rallying to a policy of European collaboration, as well as our sympathy for the person of Hitler, not insofar as he was German — which interested us relatively little and recalled painful and too recent memories — but insofar as he had become European. But that was not enough. The “mirage” of Europe might have caused light minds to lose, as survivals without purpose, the characteristics that made them members of a nation, whereas precisely these characteristics would have to stimulate the new Europe and encourage in it the noblest rivalries. Europe was not to be born on bare fields, but to be superimposed upon a real world; otherwise it would have diminished the human patrimony instead of enriching it. It had to put an end to anarchies, losses of energy, sterile rivalries, but also and above all to bind together the sheaf of the millennial forces incarnated in our twenty peoples, to be a sum, a crowning achievement.

To be truly European, to bring Europe an authentic capital, each country had to regain consciousness of its personality to the maximum.

Thus we were both Europeans and patriots, and Europeans because patriots. I tried to raise Belgians to the continental plane; but with equal ardor I stimulated their pride. Our Burgundian mystique — the Great Low Countries! — reaching beyond the mutilated Belgium of 1830, ceaselessly revived the exalted memories of the most pathetic times in our history, when we were, with Philip the Good, Charles the Bold, and Charles V, the heart, the light, the beauty of Western Europe.

We united the glories of the present with those of the past. Never were Belgian newspapers so radiant with national pride as the Rex press during that winter following defeat. For the defeat of May 1940 itself was, for us, a subject of pride: a heroic defeat in which our army, lacking aviation and armored matériel, had fought with desperate courage.

We could have, like so many others, drawn the veil of oblivion over the dead and no longer spoken of a campaign that had militarily opposed us to Hitler. But precisely, we wished to cry Heil Hitler! only with head held high, proud of our country, proud of the courage with which it had defended its soil against Hitler himself. In the same way, our history praises Caesar's Pax Romana but sings of the bravery of our forefathers who were defeated while barring the road to the Roman conqueror, the civilizer and unifier.

That is why, at the same time as we sought to develop among our public an intelligent understanding of United Europe, we published an impressive series of articles that evoked, day by day, each of the glorious aspects of the May 1940 campaign in which our soldiers had resisted step by step — more than anyone in Europe — against unbeatable troops.

We did not have to deny our heroes. We had to be proud of them, to exalt with emotion their nobility and their sacrifice. They are part of the glorious patrimony of our people. Them too we brought to Europe, moving and decisive proofs of the survival, within our national community, of the highest, strongest, purest virtues. A Europe that did not consider itself morally enriched by such testimony would have been unworthy of a great destiny.

In any case, it interested us only insofar as we would be received into it not as poor relations, but as vigorous representatives of a millennial people. It was this people, the whole of it, that had to enter the new Europe, with its sumptuous centuries, with its spiritual treasures, its hearths of beauty, its virtues, its traditions, its dead, symbols of fidelity and sacrifice, its dead of all frontiers and all causes, the dead of the Golden Spurs and of Woeringen, the dead of the Peasants' War and of Waterloo, the dead of 1914 and of 1940!

We knew that Hitler understood this, respected this. We regretted, in September and November 1940, missing the chance that was offered to us.

We were not among those who become discouraged. We would never become discouraged.

Without this unshakable faith, how could we have continued a struggle that was already proving painful, that was going to cost us so much suffering, so much blood, but that would also grant us that joy of hearts irradiated by a great gift and a great dream, that superhuman joy that no pain could extinguish, that no pain will extinguish...

XXV

DECOMPOSITION IN BRUSSELS

German silence. — Impossibility of contacts with Berlin. — Disillusionments in cascade. — The Rexists pushed aside. — Henri de Man's tumble. — His last fish. — Violent quarrel with General Reeder. — Indifference, unconsciousness, liquefaction of public opinion.

At the extreme opposite of German policy in France, which sought with all its strength to favor collaboration, to please and to inspire confidence, German policy in Belgium grew more and more contracted from the autumn of 1940 onward.

Assisted by Counselor Achenbach — a strange, refined heron, openly of the extreme left, with a subtlety à la Marcel Proust, fishing without missing a detail of the tremors and luminosity of the French waters — Otto Abetz had made the Reich embassy in Paris the meeting place of the intellectuals and artists of the two peoples. Lecturers were exchanged, books were translated, films were prepared jointly, those sympathies of the mind that are the filigree of existence were tied together.

For their part, French and German businessmen, industrialists, exporters rubbed shoulders in an atmosphere of curiosity, work, and sympathy, stimulated by General Michel, intelligent and simple, a deadpan man with a lively complexion and the mischievous head of a slightly bawdy canon, always affable amid the anthill of experts and young German women, most of them ravishing, at the Hôtel Majestic.

But in Brussels there was silence. A few German soldiers, all of second rank, associated with the high dignitaries of the V.N.V. As for the population and the elites, nothing, or almost nothing, was attempted on their side.

Not the slightest exchange of views with political men. Few contacts with intellectuals. One would have said that they wished to weary this population, to push it back into indifference, although it had been, during the summer of 1940, infinitely more resolved on collaboration than the French were.

The military governor, General von Falkenhausen, saw in private the personalities of the nobility, of finance, people of his caste, to whom he offered his luxurious English cigarettes, made specially for him in Ghent, marked either with the pediment of "his" château of Seneffe in Brabant, or with the head of his favorite spaniel. But between the vulgum pecus and himself he had raised, like an old mandarin, an impassable Chinese wall. The new Europe and collaboration were, for him, twaddle to which he would not, for anything in the world, have devoted a tenth of the time he spent presenting lumps of sugar to his King Charles, the arbiter of everything.

In Paris, the Germans sought collaboration. The champagne, the foie gras, the monumental mirrors of the embassy on the rue de Lille directed the collaborationist current at great expense.

In Brussels we had no need of foie gras! Reason and national interest were enough for us, for we had grasped the importance that a European concentration would have for our country. But what future was being reserved for it? We would have liked contacts that would have enlightened us. But Berlin remained motionless, impenetrable as a Buddha.

Always opposed to political negotiations with the German occupation authorities alone, I thought that it was in Berlin itself that one had to become informed. But whereas the Pétains and the Lavals were invited by Hitler and dealt directly with the Wilhelmstrasse, not one of our compatriots had had the possibility of approaching either the Führer or M. de Ribbentrop. At the very least, the Foreign Office would have had to be sounded out. Passport applications remained invariably unanswered. Visibly, General von Falkenhausen did not want a single one of us to have direct conversations with Berlin. Belgium was his private preserve.

Our country thus found itself at the mercy of the Militärverwaltung, which saw in us, the Rexists, a band of nuisances. At the beginning of 1941, our difficulties worsened. Yet this period was going to be decisive.

The public, in its great majority, was still convinced of the impossibility of an Allied victory. Realists, as the people of Meuse and Scheldt are, the Belgians would have found it normal for men of the New Order to secure the key positions, occupy the administrative posts, and form a government capable of holding its rank in the European policy to which the French had just rallied.

The King's visit to Hitler had at first surprised people. It disappointed everyone from the moment it became clear that no decision of magnitude would result from it for the good of the country. Great hope asserted itself again when a decree ordered the rejuvenation of the cadres of the Belgian state. Thanks to this measure, innumerable posts were going to become free: new, daring, enterprising men could be appointed to them... It was one more disappointment.

Crowds, always female, give themselves to triumphant males. Seeing that we were marking time, they gave us no credit for our patriotic tenacity.

Within the Rexist movement itself, it took all my grip to master the grumblers and the impatient men, more concerned with immediate results than with a definitive solution in accordance with the interest and honor of our people.

Henri de Man, who did not hold his men in hand as well as I did mine, was quickly overwhelmed, outpaced, drowned. His great war machine, the U.T.M.I., invaded by Flemish elements more V.N.V. than socialist, slipped from his hands after a few months. Soon de Man was no more than a memory at the U.T.M.I., dispersed by the wind like the smoke of his pipe.

There remained to him his newspaper, Le Travail, into which hundreds of thousands of francs of union assets had been swallowed, and whose circulation, in a few months, fell to six thousand copies.

Henri de Man came from time to time to dine at my house, smiling like a mischievous priest and making fun of his own setbacks. On Saturdays, he used Le Travail's gasoline to slip away to a peaceful hamlet in the Meuse valley, lost among the apple orchards. He spent his weekend fishing, tanned by the sun, drawing on his short black pipe. He returned Sunday evening to Brussels, crossing paths with German generals on foot, stupefied and crimson at seeing pass a car carrying landing nets and fishing rods.

Meanwhile, at Henri de Man's newspaper, there was the most complete confusion. His team included young socialists who were terribly ambitious, brutal, and not stifled by scruples.

De Man, a man of honor, had the same position as ours: the establishment of a real, complete, and

humane socialism; the construction of Europe, but with a worthy status for the West; collaboration, but recognition of the personality and rights of our people.

Henri de Man's collaborators were not all like him. Some of them had become, in six months, more German than the Germans. They had made contact with people of the Gestapo and dreamed only of leveling and Germanizing the whole West. Moreover, they displayed a hateful anticatholicism, a true reflex of elementary minds.

We soon had in them bitter enemies, contriving to disparage us and to fight us in the German offices where they had access.

Having become almost the sole reader of his newspaper, realizing that the system of dipping into the old union coffers was becoming more and more anomalous, overtaken by his denationalized editors, having created the U.T.M.I. only to have it stolen from him by the V.N.V., de Man went fishing more and more, drew on his pipe more and more, and cared less and less about this one and that one.

One fine morning, Le Travail ceased to appear. It had died as the Plan had died, as everything de Man had undertaken had died. A philosopher whose doctrines were indigestible as boiled leather, a blackener of philosophico-social books impenetrable as horn, Henri de Man was a charming man, fanciful as a butterfly, knowing how to leave the whole business there to go sit beside the strawberry beds of Bouvines and tease gudgeons as distracted as himself. He fished almost all the gudgeons of the Meuse and its tributaries.

He was heard of again when his son, totally unknown, obtained in 1942, to general stupefaction, a mandate as alderman of Greater Brussels. De Man junior might have fished less well.

The son being placed, the father placed himself. After multiple adventures, he slid prudently, like a good skier, toward the snowy slopes of Helvetia — before the great liquidation of 1944. As in sentimental novels, he caught one last fish in the form of a pretty Swiss woman. The Belgian government took good care not to demand his extradition. As his former socialist colleague Balthazar, minister of the Pierlot government, declared quite bluntly, "it is dangerous to have left little papers lying about on de Man's table in 1940. These papers were photocopied and the photocopies are in Belgium."

His young wife on his knees, his short pipe between his teeth, facing the smooth snows and the pink glaciers, de Man must often say to himself, with an ironic eye, that his personal adventure might have turned out a little worse...

Only the V.N.V. and Rex remained in the lists. Each week, in Wallonia, the half-dead sperm whales of the old parties, the flunkies, eunuchs, lackeys, were seen rising again to the surface and taking new places.

The misunderstanding could no longer be prolonged. The public had to be enlightened. One Saturday evening, I dipped my pen in vitriol. The next morning there appeared in Le Pays réel an article in which I dissociated myself from everything being done outside us, and in which I cleared my responsibility and that of Rex in the most explicit terms.

It was a frightful scandal, all the more frightful because I had at the same time written to General von Falkenhausen, asking to meet him, so as to be able to tell him my way of thinking face to face.

I was received Tuesday morning by General Reeder, president of the Military Administration. He was a corpulent man, very red in complexion, a native of Cologne, where before the war he had exercised important administrative functions. I would have occasion later to judge his disinterestedness, his honesty, his sense of duty. General Reeder was the most remarkable figure, and also the noblest and most respectable, of all the German occupation personnel in Belgium. Austere, living harshly like a soldier, working by day, working by night, this solid man gave himself body and soul to his task.

He had a sensitive heart, an exceptional delicacy of feeling. A man of administration, but military to the depths of his being, he lived only to serve his country and — it must be said if one wishes to be sincere — our country as well. Because he was an upright, frank, and just man, he had succeeded in exactly reconciling his duties as a soldier of the Reich and his duties toward the people whose direction he partially assumed. As I knew him better, I appreciated and admired this man. I finally came to feel for him a deep affection that will never weaken.

But in 1941, General Reeder was a beginner in Belgium. He did not know a word of French and showed himself very recalcitrant toward everything that was not Flemish. My article plunged him into an indescribable anger. How, in full occupation, did someone dare thus to smash windows and protest publicly against the appointments for which the Militärverwaltung had assumed responsibility? Long stirred up against me by certain provocateurs, my act of independence appeared to him as an act of rebellion. As soon as I entered his office, I realized that sparks were going to fly. Indeed, it became a contest of who would shout loudest. The general pounded on the table. I replied with equal energy. I left, speaking loudly, breaking off the encounter.

I really believed that everything was finished, but I was determined not to change attitude. What a drama! The King, over there in his park, an isolated idler, having obtained nothing at Berchtesgaden; de Man still fishing his gudgeons; the V.N.V. conducting its action alone with the representatives of the Reich in Belgium... All this at the very moment of the dazzling triumphs of the Wehrmacht in Yugoslavia, in Greece, in Crete, on the borders of Egypt, when, humanly speaking, the Germans were on the eve of imposing their peace on the world or of playing at least the role of arbiters on the continent...

I looked in vain for help around me. The public, selfish, was concerned above all with its food supply. The rich bourgeois of the Léopold quarter, the avenue Louise, and the avenue des Nations accumulated stocks of canned goods at the bottom of their cellars, where venerable bottles were quietly aging. Each lot, planned for one year’s consumption, was walled up separately. There were four lots, since the war, obviously, had to last four years, as the other one had.

The most antifascist groups arranged matters with the Germans. The owners of the Masonic newspaper La Dernière Heure negotiated in complete tranquility the sale of their facilities to a Nazi group, for an enormous price. Thanks to this operation, the occupier was able to publish in Brussels the most remarkable German-language newspaper in all Europe, Die Brusseler Zeitung, which was to reach a daily circulation of nearly two hundred thousand copies.

The “elites” were no less opportunistic. At the University of Brussels, Procurator General Cornil attended, in grand ceremonial style, in the front row of listeners, lectures given by professors of the Reich. Magistrates, publishers, well-padded bourgeois — everyone adapted, swallowed his tongue, settled into the war with great reinforcements of cans of olive oil, crates of soap, preserves of every kind, religiously walled up.

Everywhere indifference and unconsciousness reigned. The only preoccupation — alas, very Belgian — was the belly. How to fill it? A single sign of national energy: the organization of the black market. “Do you have good addresses?”

People managed. They stocked up. They laughed. But Belgium was sliding downhill.

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XXVI

APOGEE OF THE V.N.V.

Civilians in uniforms. - The V.N.V. tide. - Excellence of the Flemish nationalist cadres. - Prodigious rise of cultural life in Flanders in 1941. - Nonexistence of the V.N.V. in Wallonia. - The V.N.V. in Brussels. - The Dinasos and Joris Van Severen. - The strangling of Rex-Flanders. - The unified V.N.V. - Intoxication with power. - Toward a dramatic tumble.

The V.N.V., at the height of its rise, had installed itself on the Rue de la Loi, the ministry quarter.

“Nadar” barriers cut across the sidewalk at the level of the powerful building over which floated the orange flag, marked with a blue delta, a modern evocation of the mouth of the Scheldt, the Meuse, and the Rhine, the three Netherlandish rivers.

Inside the mansion, everything had been newly done up: herringbone floors, friezes, pier glasses, coffered ceilings; tables, armchairs, magnificent bookcases, the last word in modern art, adorned the conference and reception rooms, sumptuous gifts from the magnates of the furniture industry.

Fashion was for brilliant uniforms. The Rexists were, besides, as fanatical as the V.N.V. in the matter of official masquerade: kepis shining like the dome of the Palais de Justice, with gilding, eagles, palms, cords; leather shoulder-belts gleaming like macadamized tracks; riding breeches (even if one was incapable of staying on a bicycle), dazzling boots that drove the little typists mad.

At Staf De Clercq’s headquarters, nobody was less than a major. There were quantities of them, lined up in the offices like great banded cigars in their box. The bands were the shoulder-straps, braided shoulder-straps of a Wehrmacht major, quite simply.

The most impressive of all these warriors was good, peaceful Staf De Clercq, who was as made to put on military dress as to play the part of Marguerite at the Bavarian Court or to dance the gavotte at the Petit Trianon. His Capuchin-father beard jarred in this ultra-warlike decor. Even retired engineer generals shaved in 1940. Yet Staf, without his beard, would no longer have been Staf. It was part of the landscape. Staf, so as not to disorient the masses, went at it slowly, cutting off each week a few tufts of hair, abandoning them as a candidate for sin gradually gets rid of an encumbering virtue. With time, the river-beard became a little black goatee, pointed like a badger. Staf came to look like an Italian warrior, a pink and round Balbo.

But the offensive spirit was not limited to sartorial innovations. The V.N.V. had not wasted its time during the thirty or forty weeks that followed the invasion. In the spring of 1941, it was everywhere: in

the College of Secretaries-General; at the head of the principal provincial administrations of Flanders; also at the direction of the largest urban centers. In Antwerp, the Flemish nationalists occupied several aldermanships; they held Bruges; they held Ghent, where Dr. Elias reigned, Staf De Clercq's right arm, an able, conquering, hardworking administrator. Hundreds of local V.N.V. leaders had taken in hand the administration of their commune. The V.N.V. possessed good cadres in the provinces, tested by a long struggle: doctors, notaries, schoolteachers, come out of the peasantry. The Germans allowed Gérard Romsée to appoint his candidates wholesale, candidates who were, moreover, in every respect worthy of sympathy and consideration, decent people, devoted, straight as the masts of their boats, honest as the bread of their farms.

We sincerely rejoiced at these V.N.V. victories. They endowed Flanders with truly Flemish administrators, come from the people and remaining in contact with the people, understanding its soul. These men fortunately replaced the mayors of the old parties or of the noble caste, who pinched out French in order to distinguish themselves from the rustics, and spoke the Flemish language only (with tight lips) to the cripple who came begging at the foot of the grand staircase, or to the cowherd girl pulling at the teats of her beasts in the pasture near the castle.

These political changes were healthy, in conformity with the general interest. The investment of the administrations by the V.N.V. teams marked, after a century of abuses and errors, the return to a serious, real, fertile nationalism.

The most remarkable rise of Flanders, in 1940 and 1941, appeared on the cultural plane.

To put an end to interpolations, the French-language press had been radically eliminated from the first day. Everything was done so that literature and the various forms of art sprung from Flanders should occupy a rank worthy of their value.

Beyond state initiatives, an unofficial policy, supported by the Reich authorities, assured Flemish masterpieces a radiance such as they had never known. It did not fail, of course, to recall how this regional art was connected to the great Germanic trunk. To honor the past, Rubens, the Germano-Flemish artist par excellence, was celebrated. For the present, works by modern painters of Flanders, of exceptional value and far superior to the painters of the Third Reich, were exhibited in Germany. The best Flemish writers were translated into German. Their works were published, in their original language, in unusual print runs, at an affordable price and in an attractive format. They were printed in one hundred thousand copies at a time.

The press agency that carried out these American-style launches was under German control. Thus it was the Germans who assured the masterpieces of Flemish literature this broad diffusion, putting them within reach of the most remote hamlets. It was extremely adroit on the part of the Reich. This impetus given to Flemish culture did not alter the certainty that the latter would one day be capped by German culture. Nevertheless, in 1941, this effort at the Flemish stage made a vivid impression. Flanders, very proud, and rightly so, of its culture, was extremely flattered by it.

The German press published in Brussels practiced the same tactic, but with an exclusivism even more marked.

The Brusseler Zeitung, printed on splendid paper, published prestigious art pages devoted to highlighting the cultural treasures of our provinces. No Belgian newspaper ever made such an effort. The collection of the Brusseler Zeitung will remain, from this point of view, a model of the genre. For

the innumerable Walloon and Flemish readers of this paper, this was a change from the everlasting polemics of the prewar Belgian press about tram-line stops, dog taxes, and stamps placed on slaughterhouse meat.

But the articles in the German daily were chosen in a significant way: nine out of ten were devoted to Flanders.

Whether it was a matter of appointments or of culture, the policy of the occupation authorities in 1941 was identical: to emphasize everything that was Flemish, in which they saw a Germanic outgrowth useful to flatter, and suspicion or lack of interest for the other half of the country.

In Flanders itself, Rex counted many adherents. By contrast, up to May 10, 1940, the V.N.V. had no extension in Wallonia. Rex alone gathered there the forces of the New Order. The only movement that could have competed with us, the National Legion, had altogether two or three hundred members, a sort of 1919 fascists, knights of the cudgel and castor oil. Rex had always felt repugnance for that kind of humiliating and useless violence, which only excites the adversary further.

The Belgian, until the bloody follies of 1944, was a good roundish fellow, fond of quietly drinking his glass, of peacefully cultivating his leeks on Sundays in shirt sleeves. He provoked no one and did not like being provoked. The National Legion therefore had met with no success. Its chief, Hoornaert, was a Liège pettifogging lawyer, unintelligent and lugubrious, who wrote interminable articles in a heavy jargon. His speeches were sepulchral. That too was not pleasing in Wallonia, where, even before tombs, people keep an astonishing good humor: Chez Boniface: One is better here than across the way, the sign of the cabaret located precisely opposite the entrance to the Liège cemetery, at the top of the landscape of light towers, shining waters, violet roofs, and factory chimneys of the Meuse city, jauntily declares.

The influence of the V.N.V. was also rather weak in Brussels. In the surrounding countryside — a land of fine birches, heather, fat green earth, lit with anemones, columbines, meadow speedwells — the V.N.V. counted twenty thousand voters, sturdy Flemish peasants living in rich villages, cultivating asparagus and strawberries in their forcing-houses, drinking hard and tumbling girls in the embankments and hazel groves on fair evenings.

As for the city of Brussels, it was refractory to V.N.V. propaganda. In the communal elections of 1938, Rex had obtained five seats, while the V.N.V. had run to failure. Flemish Brussels was a slogan, but it was the opposite of a fact.

In order to swell the number of pupils in the Flemish schools of the capital, in the winter of 1940, the V.N.V. men installed in the Language Commission had had recourse to calculations not lacking in originality: everything that was not strictly Walloon had been enrolled automatically in the Flemish-language school sector. Thus one saw children of Italians forcibly hitched to the intensive study of the “moedertaal,” to the great amazement of their Neapolitan or Calabrian parents!

In Flanders itself, the nationalist effort was very scattered up to May 10, 1940. Three New Order groups divided the clientele: the V.N.V., Flemish, solely Flemish; the Dinaso movement, partisan of the gathering together of the great Burgundian Netherlands; and finally Rex-Flanders, completely autonomous, but under my personal authority and working in community of ideal with Rex-Wallonia and Rex-Brussels.

The Dinaso movement, preaching the reconstitution of the XVII Provinces, was, at first sight, sympathetic to us. It aimed more at forming an active minority than at appealing, as we did, to the great mass. Moreover, it radiated only in Flanders and, a little also, in Holland. During the winter of 1939-1940, it had constituted a few nuclei of sympathizers in certain Walloon centers. It enjoyed declared friendships in Brussels, in cultivated circles.

The chief of the Dinaso movement, Joris van Severen, had been elected deputy for Brussels on the V.N.V. lists. But this haughty intellectual had not been able for long to fraternize with his rather homely colleagues, wholly occupied with the defense, for eminently electoral purposes, of little local interests: the question of cross-border workers, brickyards, floods, early vegetables. Van Severen was a visionary, haunted by a grandiose past that had had its purest radiance in Bruges itself, the city of his heart. He lived about ten kilometers from the old, magnificent gray belfry, in a villa without luxury, where he unrolled impressive maps of the XVII Provinces past and future. With his immense forehead, his lips deliberately hard, his black eye as piercing as Goebbels's, he had given his movement the bearing of a military Order, between the Crusaders and Hitler's storm troops.

Dressed in uniforms the color of scorched lawn, packs on their backs, preceded by landsknecht drums and fifes, the Dinasos made interminable marches, by day and by night, no one quite knew why.

A militia is not an end in itself. I believe that van Severen saw in this hard and disciplined life a means of detaching his people from a certain pot-bellied mediocrity much honored in the land of Breughel. He took care to give all the demonstrations of his adherents an austere, rigid, almost glacial style of life. When he made a speech, applause was forbidden. This man had the temperament of a Grand Master of the Templars.

He had gathered a very interesting elite, concerned with higher problems, territorial, social, moral. It was only an elite, but it was a remarkable elite.

Why did the police rush upon a pure intellectual like van Severen on May 10, 1940? He was swept up in the Saint Bartholomew criminally organized by the Jansons and the Ganshof van der Meerschs. When I was brought out of a cell in the Bruges prison at four o'clock in the morning on May 15, 1940, I saw, chained a few meters from me, dear Joris van Severen. He was of delicate health, long suffering from the stomach. We had been treated infamously in that prison, our arms tied behind our backs with ropes. Some prisoners had been seized by frightful epileptic fits. I was stupefied on seeing van Severen, his features ravaged, disfigured by a five-day beard, almost white, his eye giving off a fatal sadness.

Yet one had to hold firm. We remained lined up for two hours near the canal with wooden balconies flowered with geraniums; morning was rising, all pink; the bells were ringing; each sound traveled alone through the fresh, empty, pure air; a few women passed, eyes lowered, silent, going to Mass; a fat blond shopkeeper, breasts and hips floating in a flowered nightdress, slid up the iron shutter of her display, where, with its nose against the glass, a living turtle stood still. But van Severen looked at nothing. He seemed plunged into an inner abyss.

When at Dunkirk I was torn from the truck in which we had been placed, for a mock execution, his head did not move; his eyes remained lost in the distance.

Six days later, he was murdered near the kiosk at Abbeville. Without an unnecessary gesture, without saying a word, without even looking at his executioners, he went to place himself of his own accord near the leprous little wall in the shade of the chestnut trees, before which there already rose a heap of

corpses of men, old women, young girls, riddled with French bullets, larded with bayonet blows.

Joris van Severen was murdered — like all the others — without a single one of the French soldiers who took part in this massacre knowing what he was accused of, or even who he was. They killed for the sake of killing, at random, because the German armored vehicles were advancing and because someone had to pay for it!

If Joris van Severen had survived, he would have been a formidable competitor for the V.N.V., for he was of a quite superior intellectual temper. The members of Dinaso regrouped with courage and faith, sustained by the mystique of their martyr. But they were disoriented. Some turned toward Rex-Flanders. But there too, there was complete uncertainty.

It would have been normal for Rex-Flanders to resume its activity at the same time as Rex-Wallonia and Rex-Brussels. Our Flemish leaders had come to see me in Brussels. I had advised them to resume action everywhere, according to the known directives: dignity with the occupier, prudence in relations with subordinates; rallying to the policy of collaboration of the forces of Europe insofar as our old Netherlands would recover a place worthy of their past; sincere fraternity with the National Socialists of the various European communities, but being ourselves logical National Socialists, that is to say heralds of our people, as well as of socialism.

Rex-Flanders, having always conducted its struggle with great concern for Flemish pride, should have had its rights of action recognized in 1940 by the Militärverwaltung, like those of the V.N.V.

One could perfectly well admit that the V.N.V. demanded that all French-language movements be excluded from Flanders, whether or not they were directed from Flanders. But Rex-Flanders was a purely Flemish movement. A Paul de Mont, who had been a Rexist senator and director of our daily De Nieuwe Staat, was one of the greatest journalists — probably the greatest — of prewar Flanders, cultivated, witty, refined, profound, possessing to the highest degree the sense of the State.

No one could have said that he was not a first-class Fleming, an honor to Netherlandish letters.

The chief of Rex-Flanders in 1940, Odiel Daems, a pure-blooded Antwerp man, a young professor of sumptuous eloquence, illuminated with poetry and rumbling with force, was one of the finest orators of the Flemish country. He had valiantly made the 1940 campaign, had returned from the Stalags matured by the ordeal and by direct contact with the Third Reich. He asked authorization to republish the daily of the Flemish Rexists, De Nieuwe Staat. The military authority delayed its decision, then made known its refusal, without reasons. The V.N.V. leaders had moved heaven and earth so that the Propaganda Staffel would reject this request, waving the scarecrow Degrelle. Degrelle in Flanders!

Odiel Daems was refused any authorization to speak in public. In every city, the attitude of the German military authorities was the same: prohibition against one of the greatest orators of Flanders speaking to the people of his people!

It was unheard of. Either Rex professed abominable ideas, and those ideas were bad wherever they came from; or they were defensible, and a Walloon Rexist had to be admitted to spread them just as a Flemish Rexist was. There was absolutely nothing to be done. Under the constant pressure of the V.N.V., and without the slightest explanation, the prohibition was maintained.

Rex-Flanders, which had conquered nearly one hundred thousand votes on Flemish territory in 1936,

which had gathered immense meetings at the Sports Palace in Antwerp and, in the full Flemish countryside, at Lombeek (sixty-five thousand paying listeners!), found itself reduced to complete silence.

Our leaders in Antwerp, whom inaction was eating away, wanted to organize an information session: our combat formations of the port went in procession from their premises to the meeting hall; their chief, Paul Suys, a marvelous fellow of dynamism, devotion, and organizing spirit, future volunteer of the Eastern Front (condemned to death for that reason in 1946), was threatened with prison by the German authorities and had to pay them a fine of ten thousand francs!

Prohibition against Rex-Flanders publishing a daily, or even a weekly. Prohibition against holding a meeting. Prohibition, in 1941, against publishing the Dutch translation of my works. Flanders was a preserve. The V.N.V. intended to maneuver there alone, with the support of the Militärverwaltung.

In Wallonia, the V.N.V. could agitate, launch its colonization program. In Brussels, it could send the kids of Sicilians and Piedmontese into Flemish schools. In Flanders, by contrast, not only was Rex-Wallonia not admitted to exercise action among the thousands of Walloons living in the northern provinces, but Rex-Flanders itself saw all action among its adherents forbidden.

At every refusal, the occupation authorities Jesuitically explained to our comrades: “Come to an arrangement with the V.N.V.! Come to an arrangement with the V.N.V.!”

Since Rex was the only political movement that covered the three sectors of the country (Wallonia, Flanders, Brussels), I could, if I had been received by Hitler in the autumn of 1940, have discussed with the authority of a political leader whose party covered the whole country. It was precisely to make this privileged situation impossible that every means was used in 1941 to push Rexism back outside Flemish territory. By invading Walloon territory and speaking of colonial expansion, they wished, moreover, to be able to assert one day that the Walloons were only a part of Wallonia, and that the V.N.V. had powerful ramifications there too.

If I dug in my heels, I would see the V.N.V., enjoying the support of the occupation authorities, dangerously undermine our positions in the French-speaking region of the country. In Flanders, by contrast, we were going to lose our bases of support definitively. As for Brussels, we would be progressively and implacably driven out of it, although our adherents there were much more numerous than those of the V.N.V.

A political man must first be a realist. Our Flemish Rexists were faithful companions. I could be sure that, even officially absorbed by the V.N.V., they would keep their ideal and would personally preserve their faith in me.

I therefore had talks begun. Flanders being practically lost to us, it was better, instead of stubbornly insisting, to seek a formula of agreement. The one I proposed was accepted. It may be summed up as follows: Dinaso and Rex-Flanders merged with the V.N.V., our leaders receiving a certain number of levers of command in the unitary organization thus formed; in exchange, the new V.N.V. renounced all interference in the Walloon part of the country (there it recognized Rex’s complete political monopoly); finally, political influence in Greater Brussels was divided half and half between Rex and the unified V.N.V.

The V.N.V. obtained a victory of prestige. But that was all. And at bottom it was only an illusory

victory for it, for it renounced its activity in Wallonia, which, by reason of its demagogic character, could have created insurmountable difficulties for us. In addition, half of the authority was guaranteed to us in Brussels, where we could fear a total submergence. Finally, the Flemish Rexists recovered the right to act. Odiel Daems, who the day before had been forbidden any demonstration, found himself suddenly made a member of the V.N.V. Directorate and immediately proposed as alderman of Greater Antwerp.

This arrangement could have marked a decisive turning point, if it had been concluded in a spirit of frank comradeship. But the V.N.V., momentarily blinded by pride, had not wanted to reach an understanding with us, as we sincerely desired. It had simply profited from circumstances, with the help of the Germans, to throw us out of Flanders.

The V.N.V. assumed the airs of a great victor. Yet in the shadows its ruin was being prepared. It was henceforth going to find itself alone in facing on its own ground certain Berlin police maneuverers, who took an interest in Flanders only with the afterthought of one day dressing it up as a German province.

I took care not to pain the Flemish nationalist leaders with pessimistic remarks. I have always loved Flanders with such passion that its flourishing, even at our expense, could gladden me. But I saw the maneuver coming. The V.N.V. thought it had arrived at unification when in reality it had arrived at isolation.

The V.N.V. had played the Germanic card, but it had played it in confusion, without taking enough precautions. A political alliance is not merely a mating, it is a contract: twenty precise words are generally more important in an affair of this order than the fine speeches with which one intoxicates oneself. It was necessary to say clearly, as I would later proclaim when the opportune moment had come for us: “Germanic, yes, we are Germanic by race, like all the peoples spread from the Baltic to the Somme; but the Germans are only one branch of the Germanics, there are other branches, we ourselves are another branch. Equality of all Germanics, whether Germans or non-Germans, agreed! Fraternal collaboration of the various Germanic communities, agreed! But in recognition of the rights and the life proper to each of these communities within a unity superior to all present states. Federation of the Germanics. Federation of Europeans. But not absorption and digestion of non-German Germanics by a Germany returned to imperialism.”

I would move, at the beginning of 1943, toward a convinced political collaboration only after this position, debated over the course of numerous preparatory conversations, had been formally admitted by Hitler and by Himmler.

I can still see myself, on May 10, 1941, taking dear Raymond Tollenaere by the lapels of his jacket and warning him, a step away from the brilliant rows of tall red tulips and forget-me-nots that bordered, at the threshold of the lawns, the terrace of my residence. Tollenaere was a tall idealist, who was to die that same year as a hero in the snows and marshes of the Volkhov, under the uniform of the anti-Bolshevik volunteers of the glorious Flemish Legion. Tollenaere repeated to me several times: “Yes, a Fleming is a Germanic, but not a German; that is right, that is right.”

A German could not ask non-German comrades in combat to deny their people. The gathering together, the federation of the Germanics, had to be built on just bases and in harmony with the past of each people.

Unfortunately, if many Germans thought as we did, there were others who, from the depths of their mysterious police lairs, dreamed only of annexations, kneadings, manipulations. In 1941 they were quite determined to shove the V.N.V. around if it refused to become their accomplice.

I knew well that the V.N.V. was a movement of true, good, honest Flemings, proud, stubborn, rebellious against all domination. But they had not dotted the i's sufficiently. Already in 1941, one could with certainty predict their coming disaster.

It began in the autumn, at the time of the conjuring-away of the Flemish Legion, torn from V.N.V. influence a fortnight after its formation, to be converted into a completely German unit, commanded in German by German officers (whereas our legion, the Walloon Legion, would always jealously preserve its national language, its national command, its national standards).

Then there was, contrary to the promises made by the Brussels Militärverwaltung, and perhaps even in spite of it, the creation in Flanders of annexationist movements launched between the legs of the V.N.V., with millions, by the Gestapo. Dramatic maneuvers that made, in October 1944, of the last "Leider" of the V.N.V., Dr. Elias — a convinced Germanic but an intelligent, tenacious, and dignified Fleming — a half-prisoner, confined in a Westphalian village, forbidden to leave the region or to exercise the slightest political activity.

If we had made common cause, from the summer of 1940, Flemish nationalists and Rexists, sons of the old Netherlands both one and the other, we probably would not have run toward so complete a failure.

XXVII

CAREERISM AND MONEY

Lippens's New Year gifts. - Embryo-dictatorship à la Wodozzi. - Dubusticos adapts to the new times. - The tureens grow cold. - Rout of the dissatisfied. - Departures for London. - Snails with garlic. - Ganshof van der Meersch, the secret funds, the bloodbath. - Tschoffen changes feeding-troughs. - The Londoners and Leopold III. - The chestnuts of the Secretaries-General. - War and hyper-capitalism. - Dictatorship of money and democracy. - Full powers to Belgian High Finance, May 15, 1940.

While we were struggling desperately in the wings of collaboration, the survivors of the old parties, knowing nothing of what was going on but eager at any price to get back onto the stage, were daubing themselves from head to foot in the colors of the New Order.

Super-fascists of the Lippens kind did not use the back of the spoon in their plan for a "profound modification of the regime": "First of all," they proclaimed, "the future regime of the country must be founded on a directed economy. It will then be necessary for the structure of the State to be completely modified. The Flemings will have to be granted the autonomy they demand. All this will be possible only on condition of having a strong central power. And there will be no way out of it without dictatorial powers!"

Nothing less! Count Lippens went to present to Leopold III, by way of New Year gifts, the miraculous projects that he had indeed had, to his great regret, to prepare without the collaboration of his dear "Messrs. Elias and Degrelle." In his hodgepodge of little reforms, he again insisted on the need to have recourse to "certain forms of directed economy to which our neighbors have adapted themselves."

The Lippens Committee, which for January 1 overwhelmed the King with this stew of Marxism and National Socialism, was composed of forty politicians of diverse plumage. But many others also amused themselves by juggling the fascist crockery.

A committee called Wodozzi, founded by the former head of the King's Cabinet (where the advocate-general at the Court of Cassation, Hayoit de Termicourt, one of the democratic executioners of May 10, 1940, very anxious to give pledges to his victims of the previous day, was elbowing his way), also came out with a radical project for "putting the Belgian Constitution in order": "Freedom of the press would be conditioned by the observance of solid discipline. The King would possess both legislative and executive powers. He would legislate after consulting the Council of State, whose report would be published. He would be assisted by a responsible government [sic]. There would be only one Chamber, having only powers of a financial order. There would be no Senate. The Chamber would be elected on a corporate basis."

This embryo-dictatorship for a laboratory jar was of course completed by the famous formula of confidential government so dear to these gentlemen of the Palace: "From the end of hostilities and the conclusion of the peace treaty, the country will be consulted on the point of knowing whether it consents to entrust the King with the task of revising the Constitution. The King, at that moment, would momentarily direct the country with two or three personalities. He would complete his government if the results of the plebiscite were favorable to him."

This announced fine days for armchair dictators, Baron Frédéricq and General Van Overstraeten. The project was so pleasing at the Palace of Laeken that the King charged one of the "reformers," M. Henri Velge, with cooking the same menu in a social sauce.

Wherever one entered, one came upon a committee of revisionist politicians giving birth to projects in the fashion of the day. There was not an old minister who did not have his team of constitutional tinkerers. Albert-Edouard Janssen Committee, where Tschoffen, that tireless old fiddler, pranced about! Moyersoen Committee, where the noble Count Carton de Wiart, quite flattened, exhausted himself reconstructing the formulas of Mussolinian pills! Du Bus de Warnaffe Committee, the triumph, the bouquet!

Du Bus, called Dubusticos, was the type of government sacristan: sexless topos with the insipidness of dishwater, a puffy face, inert, colorless, a shapeless waxy sausage of papier-mâché. He had joined to himself Giovanni Hoyois, jammed into a false collar of 1890, from which emerged a green elastic necktie.

Even a woman, a senator, took part in this caucus. With our chewing-gum Dabusticos and the edifying celluloid Giovanni Hoyois, this holy soul could be at ease. Dubusticos produced, like all the others, a "preliminary draft for the modification of our fundamental charter" (the poor thing, its foundations were in very bad shape!), in which democracy, parties, Parliament took their proper beating: "The edifice must be rebuilt by adapting it to the new times. After a century of functioning, the democratic regime has led to the impossibility of governing. It is necessary to return to an accentuation of the powers and authority of the Executive. The executive power must henceforth be placed not after the Legislative but before it.

"The King is the head of the Executive.

"The strengthening of executive power must proceed above all from a notable reduction of the

attributions of the national representation."

The said representatives would receive no more than an "attendance token" and would have to be sent out to pasture eight months out of twelve.

As for the Senate, it too would be thrown overboard and replaced by a General Council escaping universal suffrage completely: "It would comprise sixty members, thirty-one of them designated by the great agricultural, commercial, and industrial interests; ten appointed by the King from among university rectors and members of the Academies [sic]; nine at the rate of one per province; and ten co-opted by the Council."

As one sees, the most retrograde conservatism was simmering, in these old-regime tureens, with leftovers of Rexism, fascism, and Hitlerism.

The tureens cooled one after another, in general indifference. First, because these soups were only muddy broths. Second, because there was truly no reason for the public to place confidence in cooks who had until then failed all their dishes.

The confusion that reigned during the winter of 1940-1941 gradually took charge of neutralizing the rush of all these left-behinds.

The old boa constrictor Lippens had to fold his coils back and wait. Pierre Nothomb-von Papen contented himself with improving his relations with the occupation authorities of the province of Luxembourg, at the expense of the does and wild boars of the beautiful forest where the graceful ghost of the Marquise du Pont d'Oye had once floated.

Marie-Thérèse Rossel, having been unable to place her newspaper at the disposal of the Propaganda Abteilung, consoled herself by seeing accumulate in a blocked account in her favor, through the Germans, the million that each month was brought in by a Soir that had not been stolen for everyone.

Big Raymond Delhaye of the Bon Marché knew by heart all the letters of congratulation he had received from the doorkeepers and ushers of the Militärverwaltung. He continued, not yet having quite understood, to invite wholesale everything that was collaborationist. When an air-raid alert interrupted his nocturnal feasts, he hurriedly led his guests to a concrete shelter, armored like a bank vault. Under some thirty hams and smoked tongues, hanging like the flags of the Invalides, people sat on crates containing an unheard-of assortment of tins of preserves. These crates were Delhaye's great weapon: he sent mountains of them to all collaborators. I myself received from him, on a single occasion, a hundred of these miraculous boxes.

He never exactly grasped the situation. In 1944 still, he cheerfully walked twenty kilometers under a blazing sun to go to the senator Rexist Léon Brunet, at his exquisite little manor of Rhode-Saint-Genèse. Delhaye was melting, but he felt his tenacious hope revive within him.

The others, who sweated less but thought more, had understood after a few months that the train of their political ambitions had derailed. They had done everything to please the Germans, given resounding testimonies of their rallying to the New Order. They had achieved nothing. So what did collaboration amount to if their appetite found no account in it?

Pierlot and Spaak, their masters before May 10, 1940, had also dreamed, during the fatal summer, of

pulling the collaborationist cart in the Nazi shafts, even if whipped by a Gauleiter. Hitler had not wanted to harness them. They had offered their services elsewhere. The others did the same, little by little. Political morality is an ointment for imbeciles. They wanted the posts, the honors, the returns. The Germans were not hiring them? There remained only to slip over to the counter opposite. Pierlot had done it. Spaak had done it. Why should they restrain themselves?

In leaving for London, the “disappointed collaborators” of Brussels or Liège could be certain that Pierlot and Spaak would reproach them for nothing. Political immorality is like Burgundy snails. No one stinks of garlic provided everyone eats it.

The most comic of these turncoats were Ganshof van der Meersch and Tschoffen.

The first, despite the mass arrests ordered by him and the crimes of which he was indirectly the cause, had returned belly to the ground to Brussels as soon as France capitulated. The Germans had begun by imprisoning him. But the man was so groveling that the Gestapo promptly wiped the slate clean. After all, it was only Belgians who, because of him, had been killed... That did not concern the Reich! Besides, policemen among themselves are always indulgent. One is not a colleague for nothing. And Ganshof had nothing to learn from Himmler’s men.

Released, the “colleague” had hung on to the coat-tails of one of the principal promoters of the New Order: Henri de Man, the Henri de Man who had so loudly magnified Hitler’s triumph, “the defeat-liberation” of May 1940, the Henri de Man who had written in his manifesto: “Do not believe that one must resist the occupier: accept the fact of his victory.”

Here, moreover, is a specimen of the incredible flatteries he addressed to the leader of collaboration, on December 27, 1940, that is to say after seven months of occupation, on the letterhead of the Auditorat général: “I know all that I owe you... I would have had great joy in seeing you, in order to express to you what I feel, better than I can in this laconic letter. Know that I shall never lose the memory of the confidence you placed in me, and please find here, dear Mr. Minister, the expression of the sentiments that will always be faithfully attached to you.

GANSHOF.”

If Ganshof had returned to occupied Belgium, it was as the advance guard of Pierlot and Spaak. He had known their first offers to the Third Reich. During the months of July and August he had expected to see them return to Brussels in Ribbentrop’s baggage-train.

The attempt had failed. The secret funds, the dear secret funds, were waiting for him on the other side of the Channel. Ganshof found himself very stupid in Brussels in 1941, far from the marvelous possibilities that this implied. No parliamentary control in London! Hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling to handle...

He too slipped away toward the hoard, returning to Brussels, behind Montgomery, only in September 1944. But for him it was a matter of making people forget his crawling exercises before the victor in 1940. And that is why Ganshof behaved as the most barbarous torturer that Belgium had known in two thousand years of its history. In a few months he had more than half a million Belgians hunted down, and sadistically had ninety-one thousand of them imprisoned.

No matter: this executioner was, for two years, the great purifier of Belgium. He thus had the

possibility of having thousands of people condemned to death before collapsing into debauchery.

Tschoffen, like Ganshof, abundantly bathed, in 1944 and 1945, his operetta-general's shoulder-straps (made in London) in the blood of his compatriots. He licked, with the same fervor as Ganshof, the boots of the New Order, begging Leopold III in writing to form a government under the occupation, declaring with Lippens, on August 20 and 27, 1940, that "the conception of democracy was obsolete" and that it was necessary "to appeal to the V.N.V. and to the Rexists, to Messrs. Elias and Degrelle."

Since we had not replanted in the National Socialist soil this old carrot eaten by slugs, and since Pierlot and Spaak, in order to make supporters for themselves, were distributing portfolios and prebends in London to all arrivals, Tschoffen, after having temporized for many months, decided to move over to the Anglophile feeding-trough, not having found a Hitlerophile feeding-trough in which to lodge the teeth of his long famished nag.

This pretty world nevertheless remained very prudent as long as there was doubt about the outcome of events. While withdrawing toward the London protectors, each took care to assure his re-entry in case of a new reversal of the situation. It was, notably, a competition among Pierlot, Spaak, and the newcomers as to who would flatter Leopold III most, after they had dragged him through the mud a year earlier. Yet what had changed since then? Nothing, except that Pierlot and Spaak had had time to learn that the King had pushed us into collaboration! Nothing, except that the same Londoners knew that the King formally disapproved their "putting themselves forward"! Nothing, except that the King had gone to Berchtesgaden, to Hitler's home!

They had "modified their attitude," as Spaak modestly wrote, because all the echoes from the occupied country repeated to them the affection of which the Sovereign was the object. "You told me," the Jewish minister Guttenstein (Gutt) whispered to M. Gattier, in a letter sent from London on February 18, 1941, "that the King was the object of a general cult; that is what my wife had told me in July."

The Belgian radio of the B.B.C. itself had become super-Leopoldian. Spaak, on February 22, 1941, wrote, unctuously: "We are intimately convinced that the reconstruction of Belgium after the war will be difficult and that the King can play a preponderant role in it." And he ended his letter by saying that Leopold III was the "symbol of passive resistance." Yet it was the same king, "symbol of passive resistance," who was to be driven from the throne by the Pierlots and the Spaaks, after having been proclaimed in their newspapers "the king of the incivics," when they learned, on returning to Brussels in 1944, that the Sovereign would no longer accept them as ministers unless they first publicly retracted.

I search in vain in what country, in what era, the same men could, with such baseness, alternately flatter and disown other men, and unsay themselves each time with such revolting cynicism.

It was not only the King who saw the Pierlots and Spaaks change their attitude toward him five times: on May 28, 1940, to stick to Reynaud; on June 26 because France was down; at the beginning of July to enter, in spite of Leopold III, on the path of collaborationism; in 1941 because they had understood that the King was extremely popular; in 1945 because letting the King return would have meant losing their ministerial portfolios.

The affair of the Secretaries-General and senior civil servants was another, equally repugnant, example of denial and opportunism.

Spaak, unable in the autumn of 1940 to enter a collaborationist ministry with Henri de Man and myself, had feared above all that the Rexists, the V.N.V., and the De Manists would implant themselves in all the administrations.

Certainly, he was ready to abandon the democratic baubles without emotion. Did he not write to Gattier, on February 22, 1941: “We know perfectly well that a new order will have to be constituted in Europe”? But, with or without new order, to keep the machinery of administration was, in Spaak’s eyes, to keep the precious network by which one retains political clientele.

The senior civil servants, docile creatures, received the pressing order to remain in office. Those men — no question of secretly putting them aboard airplanes! Each time, in their anxiety, that they asked advice from the “moral guides” left in the country by Pierlot and Spaak: “Stay!” they were answered.

They were crushed beneath their responsibilities. Poorly paid, constantly receiving draconian orders from the Militärverwaltung, exposed to ever-growing difficulties, they would have asked for nothing better than to slip away toward Eaton Place, where, seated beside Pierlot and Spaak on the solid billions in gold francs of the former Belgian State, they would have waited in peace for the wind to change!

These civil servants, embarked very much against their will in administrative collaboration, earned each month scarcely enough to buy themselves a week of provisions on the black market. They held out, modestly and valiantly, for four years. We did not like them. We would have liked to send them to the devil, because they kept alive that monstrous electoral machine of the parties that has always falsified Belgian administration. We dreamed of replacing them with a living, dynamic network of young civil servants animated by our faith. We were in continual battle with the Militärverwaltung because it preferred to keep these old cadres, broken to obedience and professionally passive. But despite their passivity or, rather, because of their passivity, we could not help sincerely admiring them. They kept almost intact, at the disposal of the “traditional” parties, that gigantic administrative octopus without which politicians are nothing. On September 3, 1944, the octopus was still in place, strong with its one hundred and twenty thousand tentacles.

All these civil servants, apart from rare new recruits, had been the perfect servants of the old parties, their masters of always. The Spaaks, the Pierlots ought to have congratulated them, decorated them. Ah, yes indeed! Public rancor had to be fixed somewhere. Scapegoats had to be delivered to it. They were there just in time. And it was these obscure name-lenders, to satisfy the delirious packs, whom in September 1944 they shoved into prisons. They were just good enough, like Leopold III, to play the role of incivics and traitors!

Most of them, after being dragged from court to court, handcuffs on their wrists, were acquitted, but years later, and discredit never left them.

Where the cynicism of the Londoners reached prodigy was in the affair of economic collaboration.

I would not wish to grow too complacently tender over the small misfortunes of these gentlemen of High Finance. To them alone, the war was profitable. They gained billions and billions. Never had the business world, in Belgium and elsewhere, accumulated fortunes as during these five years of blood and tears. For a long time their factories worked at a formidable pace, laboring day and night for the occupier, placing at his service, in Belgium alone, more than a million workers.

The Germans did not have to besiege these collaborators: it was they, from the first day, who stormed their offices, in Brussels, Paris, The Hague, throughout Europe, competing fiercely among themselves, resorting, in order to carry off orders, even to informing and denunciation.

Everywhere in Europe, the National Socialist ideal of the Third Reich was sacrificed to material returns. Wars are like that: they kill the best; they exalt, enrich, and honor schemers and perverts. While the combatant gasps and rattles in the pinked snow or the violet mud, the swindler becomes a millionaire; the rogue who has bet on both tables rises, corrupts, pockets, covers himself.

Germany wanted to win the war. To win the war, it needed disinterested hearts at the front and unscrupulous businessmen in the rear. In the occupied countries, what could it matter to the Reich, at the hour when material output alone counted, whether National Socialist ideas progressed in workshops and factories, whether a new era of social justice opened?

Germany needed urgently, not fine principles, but cannon, trucks, rifles, submachine guns, boots, textiles. To obtain them at the desired pace, the total support of capitalism was indispensable. To bring social improvements at that moment was to displease the bosses, the shareholders, the great trusts.

All wars turn against the workers, for they are won only by dint of concessions made to the magnates of industry, in contempt of the rights of the working class.

On either side of the barricade, eyes are closed to social abuses. The worker is forced to bend if he does not want to go do gymnastics in the barbed wire and minefields of the front. The bosses come out of wars omnipotent, having multiplied tenfold and modernized their equipment, after pocketing immense sums, paid in cash.

The Belgian capitalists finished the second world slaughter as swaggering as their French, English, Norwegian, and American colleagues. The war was for all of them a very good affair.

Let us therefore not weep too much over their setbacks in September 1944. But let us look all the same.

Big Finance was not born yesterday. In Belgium it had held in hand for twenty years, exactly since the end of the First World War (the starting point of Europe’s tumble), all the strings of political life, controlling it totally from outside, and controlling it even from inside whenever the game grew tight.

A Francqui had been its man in power. A van Zeeland had been its man in power. In 1940, the Finance Minister, the Jew Guttenstein (Gutt), former French spahi, was the latest of its mandatories.

The magnates of the National Bank, of the Société Générale, of heavy industry, of the electricity, coal, and cement trusts, had not, one imagines, launched themselves into collaboration without having their gigantic operations politically endorsed and guaranteed in advance.

In democracy, the State is Money. Ministers pass, money remains. A governor of the National Bank is a man much more important than a Prime Minister and, moreover, eight times better paid than he. Ministers are the clerks of the forces of Money.

They let the politicians and parties amuse themselves, splash about, and grapple with each other in the parliamentary enclosures, circuses for grown-ups. That is the democratic entertainment, for the use of the millions of simpletons who vote and believe they are something. But the ministries themselves are

the fiefs of which the politician obtains, keeps, or loses the direction according to the ukases of the fifteen or twenty caimans of Finance (sometimes fewer) who sovereignly decide everything behind the scenes.

This is the reason there is no cause to be surprised that, on the eve of evacuation, May 15, 1940, ministers Spaak and Gutt secretly handed their powers to a “small group of men in whom the Government could have confidence to serve in some way as moral guide in occupied country.”

These “guides” had been chosen, of course, from among the great sharks of the Money seas: Galopin, the governor of the National Bank, successor of the Jewish swindler Franck and practically master of three-quarters of Belgian factories; Max-Léo Gérard, returning from the fights of politico-finance; Colin, the all-powerful handler of the Kredietbank, which served as a screen for the sinister Boerenbond of the Jew Philips, unpunished plunderer of one hundred thousand small savers in Flanders; Baron Vaxelaire, the representative of the Judaized consortium of the department stores, stranglers of small commerce; Bekaert, the king of barbed wire, more than ever at the feast; and finally Tschoffen, famous for the crash of the Banque Chaudoir and other Congolese tumbles, less chilling, it seems.

Tschoffen, “moral guide,” Capuchin father of the occupied country — that was truly very funny!

The fact that the Government, represented by M. Spaak and the Jew Gutt, naturally handed over, on May 15, 1940, the secret direction of the country to these magnates is an incredible admission of the submission of democratic regimes to High Finance, an admission that Spaak and Gutt, fearing communist blackmail, tried to camouflage as long as possible, even after the “Liberation.”

When, with their backs to the wall, they had to admit the fact, they tried by every means to attenuate its significance until the day when formidable documents, called the “Lisbon documents,” cast a blinding light on these collusions.

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XXVIII

SPAAK AND GUTT, SUPPLIERS OF HITLER

The “Lisbon documents.” - Written agreement by Gutt and Spaak, approving, in 1941, the massive supply of war material to the Third Reich. - Sixty-four billion in credit. - Betrayal by Belgium’s forces of Money. - Hypocrisy of the judicial proceedings against 82,000 “economic collaborators.” - The murder of Galopin. - The fear of the businessmen who “know.” - The missing files. - Justice and bribes. - Sabotage of national work in 1941.

The “Lisbon documents,” to which Pierlot and Spaak had always, during the war, carefully avoided any allusion, should normally never have seen the light of day. Their recipient, Félicien Cattier, died at Funchal, on the island of Madeira, on February 4, 1946.

No doubt the two ministers thought that Cattier had destroyed these letters long before. Spaak let several months pass after the funeral. When he was quite certain that nothing would come out, he issued, from the tribune of the Chamber, on June 11, 1946, a formal denial to those who were

whispering that the London government had been in contact, after May 15, 1940, with the occult group of Galopin and company.

Spaak denied such contacts in the most categorical manner: “Never, during the war, did the Galopin committee address itself to the Government,” he cried.

Of course, Spaak is Spaak, and everyone knows his political opportunism. He is known to be prudent. And he was making a solemn declaration before Parliament in session.

All went well until the day—December 15, 1946—when the scandal broke. An indiscretion had allowed a newspaper, without the Cattier family’s knowledge, to come into possession of the originals of several of the Gutt-Spaak letters, “forgotten” in a file belonging to the dead man.

Since the publication of those letters, it is no longer possible to deny it. The economic collaboration and the war aid supplied to the Germans by the great Belgian trusts were indeed carried out with the agreement, the approval, the formal encouragement of the Pierlot-Spaak government, sent in writing from London—yes, from London!—in 1941, ten long months after the occupation of Belgium.

These letters establish that the businessman Hannecart (Pierre Daye’s toady) had, as early as the autumn of 1940, sent a report to Gutt; that Galopin did the same; and that the Government replied to them.

These letters from Guttenstein and Spaak are interminable, often comic when they try to explain the inexplicable, cynical when they ridicule “democracy” and encourage wartime collaboration with the Germans.

Cattier was the envoy of the Galopin group: this is acknowledged in so many words by Gutt, who wrote in these terms to Cattier, then in Lisbon: “I have not yet received your documents and am naturally awaiting them impatiently. Even before seeing the Galopin report, I am going to tell you the position I have taken.”

This personal and confidential letter from Gutt, dated February 22, 1941, is a masterpiece. The Jewish minister first explains to the banker Cattier how the Belgian parliamentarians who had taken refuge in London, and who did not understand the necessity of selling to the Germans, were the most remarkable fools. Here, word for word, as sketched by Gutt, is the account of his interview with the Belgian deputies and senators in exile: “We had, some time ago, a meeting with the parliamentarians, some of whom, with their mania for taking the opposite of common sense and realities as the basis of reasoning, declared themselves very moved at the idea of the ‘Berlin economic negotiations.’ This because the occupier classifies them under the label participation in the New Order. They are the same people who opposed Winter Relief, notably because Secours d’hiver is the translation of Winterhilfe.”

And Guttenstein explains how he shut up these poor cretins: “I told them very plainly that when one was hungry, one had to eat! that to eat, one had to buy food! that when there was not enough of it inside, it had to be bought outside! that to buy it one needed foreign currency! that to get foreign currency one had to sell outside.

“Do not think that I am exaggerating the elementary side of the reasoning; I had to put it this way, to develop it in this manner, in order to convince my listeners, or at least most of them, and they opened their eyes wide at the end of my demonstration as if they had never thought of it. I do not suppose this

will surprise you very much!”

After this splendid certificate of stupidity fired at the elected representatives of universal suffrage, Gutt concluded by saying (he himself underlines it): “You must sell.”

Sell even war material to the Germans? Yes, even war material. For the greatest part, war material! Here, without changing an iota, is the end of the Finance Minister’s letter to the banker Cattier: “I know very well that today almost all material is war material or connected with war, and that it is the buyer who chooses, not the seller. That is to tell you that I understand (and when I say ‘I’ this also represents my colleagues, who are in agreement with me on all points) your position perfectly, and that our only desire, as I have written to you, would be to lighten it.”

“On all points” was underlined by Gutt, not by me. In order that the affirmation of the Government’s total adherence to this policy of delivering “war material” to the Germans should be endorsed in due form, Spaak, also writing to Cattier, began his letter of February 22, 1941, as follows: “Dear Monsieur Cattier, Gutt has written you a long letter of which I have had knowledge.”

Thus there was no way to say that Gutt was exaggerating. Spaak acknowledges having read and approved the letter in which he was implicated along with all his colleagues. The Pierlot government was “in agreement on all points” that the magnates of Belgian industry should sell the Germans whatever the latter desired (“it is the buyer who chooses”), even if “almost all the material was war material or connected with war”!

Thus, officially, the game played by the plutocrats on both tables was accepted by Pierlot.

The Jew Gutt, man of the banks, gave written authorization, in the name of all his colleagues in the Government, for the production of Belgian factories to be inserted into the Nazi war effort.

With Pierlot, Spaak, and company giving their consent, how could Belgian economic collaboration not quickly have reached astronomical heights?

What attention would the German occupation authorities still have paid to our patriotic demands, when everything that counted in the world of business, factories, and banks was collaborating with no concern other than filling its pockets?

Between my reservations, my opposition when the interest of the country required it, my evocations of a glorious past, my constant appeals to the spirit of greatness—between our proud and conditional collaboration and the unlimited support of the great handlers of money—the Germans would have been very naive to hesitate.

On my side, they knew that the game would be tight, that I would give myself to European collaboration only insofar as Belgium was admitted to it on an equal footing.

On the other side, nothing was being asked for except money, which cost the Germans only additional entries in the clearing register. If only the product of this traffic had served to feed Belgium! But even that excuse did not hold. The supplies were entered on account. The German debit, as a result of these deliveries, rose higher and higher and reached the insane sum of sixty-four billion on September 1, 1944. Sixty-four billion in material given without real counterpart to the Third Reich!

If these great capitalists had had a national sense, if they had made common cause with us to demand a German policy that was clear in the West, a just distribution of influence between Flemings and Walloons, assurances concerning the future of our country, if they had supported our demands with the weight of their economic potential, it is very probable that precise commitments would have been obtained, that an end would have been put to the muddle of the State and to the maneuvers of clans.

But great capitalism is fundamentally stateless. Its treasures are in its strongboxes. Its subjects are in its offices and workshops. Its alliances are among its suppliers and buyers.

In Belgium it adapted itself with prodigious ease to the German fact. We, on the other hand, argued foot by foot until the last day. The magnates, for their part, fitted their trusts into the Hitlerian plan from the first weeks. They manufactured everything the Reich wanted. They invested hundreds of millions of francs in gigantic expansions so as to be able to mass-produce essential products lacking in the German economy. By 1941, great Belgian capitalism was already nothing more than a section of the great capitalism from across the Rhine. The scale of the collaboration supplied by the Belgian economy filled Marshal Goering with astonishment: “The best in Europe,” he repeated.

A Galopin did as much for Germany at war as the most powerful magnates of the Ruhr. Belgium was, along with Bohemia, one of the very great war workshops of the Third Reich, with this difference: in Bohemia Hitler had to place a German at the head of Skoda, whereas in Belgium Galopin performed his role to the complete satisfaction of his “clients.”

Galopin (National Bank), Cattier (Société Générale), Colin (Kredietbank) controlled virtually all Belgian industry. Hannecart’s cement trust, for example, a trust so important for Germany’s war works in the West, was more than ninety-five percent in the hands of the great banks. The Galopin committee held everything in its hands. With the greatest ease, it sent down through its channels the instructions of Gutt and Spaak.

Certainly, copies of the documents signed by the London ministers were not handed over to the underlings. But the spirit of these authorizations was communicated exactly. Each industrialist knew himself covered.

Even before the war, Gutt’s role within the Government was known to the public. The contacts between the Brussels trusts and the Belgian government in London were an open secret.

There were many other messages besides those that were sent to Cattier in 1941. Hannecart, if he had wished, could have published formidable texts in 1945. Galopin, too, possessed documents of the first order, even more precise than Cattier’s. But clever indeed is the person who will say where the Galopin file disappeared.

This disappearance of the collaboration files had something hallucinating about it. Essential documents from the royal file (notably those concerning me)? Eclipsed! File of the London government? Buried! Henri de Man-Spaak file? Smothered, apart from trifles! Galopin file? Untraceable since the murder of its holder! Cattier file? Hidden, remaining unknown long after the death of its owner, revealed only partially through an almost miraculous chance...

Thus the police and judicial repression unleashed against the Belgian economic forces after 1944 was as scandalous as the official encouragements of Spaak and Gutt had been in 1941.

Think whatever one likes of these industrialists and bankers; proclaim that they helped prolong the war, that they pocketed billions reddened with blood, that they had, without any guarantee, completely bound our economy to that of the Reich—agreed, a hundred times agreed! We are the first to be scandalized, we who were politically torpedoed by their shameless maneuvers, we who saw our comrades-in-arms die gratuitously by the thousands on the Eastern Front in order to restore prestige to their fatherland, while the others, the big men, earned billions of marks by sabotaging that prestige!

But the Government, for its part, by what right was it indignant in September 1944? What was done was done because Pierlot, Spaak, and Gutt had officially admitted and recommended it. It truly required the unheard-of cynicism of a Spaak and a Gutt to send, at the "Liberation," the democratic cops to hunt down more than eighty thousand industrialists, since these same ministers had approved "on all points" economic collaboration with Germany.

But the Spaak of 1944, in order to remain in power, absolutely had to abandon prey to the communist packs, in whom he then saw his future allies. The publication, in 1946, of the Cattier documents of 1941—not to mention the offers, then unknown, made by Pierlot and Spaak to the Germans in June and July 1940, nor their written approval of my negotiations and those of Pierre Daye with Otto Abetz—would have instantly toppled the Pierlot-Spaak-Gutt trio.

In order to divert the storm from their own heads, the ministers therefore allowed, without breathing a word, infamous proceedings to be brought against tens of thousands of businessmen who had followed exactly the instructions they had had sent to them from London. The number of these "economic collaborators" hunted down by the police and justice of Pierlot and Spaak, against whom judicial files were constituted, rose within a few months to more than eighty-two thousand! Everything Belgium counted in the way of important businessmen was thrown into the bath.

The inconvenient witnesses had disappeared. Terrified, without daring to say a word, Cattier had fled to Funchal, in order to avoid the worst. Galopin, for his part, had had the marvelous idea of dying shortly before the triumphal return of Gutt and Spaak. How could Gutt and Spaak have denied their support if Galopin had been present at their return? But he was no longer there.

In the world of High Finance, people die quickly as soon as they become cumbersome. The corpses of the Staviskys, the Barmats, and the Francks had tragically taught us this even before the war. Who killed Galopin? I tried, during my leave from Cherkassy, to see clearly into it, but in vain.

As far as the Germans are concerned, they were great friends of Galopin; they appreciated him greatly, extolled him to the skies. That was normal. No one in Belgium had rendered them material services as eminent as his. The Military Administration did for him what it had done since 1940 for only one man, Borms: it ordered all newspapers to publish a dithyrambic eulogy, drafted by the Propaganda Abteilung, in which Galopin was presented as martyr No. 1 of economic collaboration.

Whom did his death serve? That is the question one must ask. The Germans? Certainly not. Us? We had nothing to do with that individual. The London ministers? That is much more probable. Galopin had them in his grip, and he would not have let himself be sent to Saint-Gilles by them without defending himself. He ceased to have them in his grip at the precise instant when he pitched forward under the burst of fire.

The presumed executioners of Galopin were discovered in 1945 and noisily presented as members of an extremist Flemish group. Given the conditions under which "justice" was then exercised in Belgium,

it was impossible to know whether they had been agents provocateurs or double agents. In any case, the elimination of Galopin arranged things famously well: it silenced him first—an essential point—and then totally terrorized all those who might have “uncovered” the politicians of London.

No one, after that burst of gunfire, risked bringing out the Galopin file—which nevertheless exists!—not wishing to collect in his guts a second series of pretty little submachine-gun bullets.

Cattier no more risked bringing out his little papers, though they were so eloquent, so significant. Even ten months after his death, when some of them were published, the Cattier family hastened to send a very convoluted letter to the press affirming that it had had nothing to do with this indiscretion.

The heirs themselves were trembling.

The eighty-two thousand “economic collaborators” delivered to the furies of repression by the super-Pontius Pilates Pierlot, Spaak, and Gutt, had nothing left, in order to get out of the mess, but to resort to all forms of democratic corruption.

Ninety-six percent of these persecuted men managed, by blows of millions, to reconquer their liberty.

Our unfortunate comrades of the front, on the other hand, did not have secret accounts, bars of gold, or bags of diamonds carefully put aside before the tumble. They were sentenced to death or to dozens of years of hard labor.

The others—who would reproach them for it?—betrayed so cowardly by their advisers Gutt and Spaak, distributed all the tips that were necessary. I know one who, in very bad shape, having agreed to cough up three million, was immediately quit of all trouble. He put himself back, as if nothing had happened, at the head of his factory. As a resourceful good Belgian, he recovered his three million on war supplies to the Americans!

But generally, one hundred to one hundred and fifty thousand francs were enough for a file to become white or to disappear forever. Seventy-nine thousand “economic collaborators” managed thus, more or less, by dint of bribes.

The other three thousand, who were dragged to the end of the judicial complications, were those who had not been able to “shell out,” or who were hunted by competitors, or who bore a particularly conspicuous name, pinned up by the communist press.

As for the seventy-nine thousand privileged ones, no one will make anyone believe that their files were scrupulously examined. Materially, it was impossible. A thousand, two thousand deputy prosecutors would have been needed for that work alone.

Only the most formidable corruption known in the judicial history of Belgium allowed this gigantic liquidation, while three thousand poor devils paid for everyone the fact of having followed the advice of Spaak and Gutt.

Faced with this frenzy of collaboration aroused by the gangsters of capitalism, with the support of the “Belgian” ministers of London, we who spoke of the rights of our people to preserve its personality became absolutely grotesque in the eyes of the Germans.

What were we, beside the billions represented by the National Bank, by the Société Générale—money and production machines of decisive importance, inexhaustible sources of war material, instruments of Hitler's new victories?

The political disintegration could obviously only accelerate in a country betrayed in this way by magnates with gilded—and bloodied—paws, formally approved "on all points" by Pierlot, by Gutt, and by Spaak, the three untouchable heroes of the liberating "Resistance"!

XXIX

THE BLACK DAYS OF COLLABORATION

German and Belgian capitalists. - Falkenhausen, general of 1914. - Underhand maneuvers. - Weariness and bitterness in 1941. - Difficulties at Rex-Liège. - The tangle of Dienststellen. - Police mafias and agents provocateurs. - Sly struggle against our Youth. - Mad creation of Agra. - Total disgust. - Three victories of the Reich in the spring of 1941. - Collaboration more necessary than ever. - Blind rush of Belgians toward the Germans. - 403,548 voluntary worker commitments. - How to avoid the abyss? - Offer to the Führer. - Dead end. - The miracle of June 22, 1941.

The German occupation authorities were acting in the best immediate interests of their country by preferring, at least provisionally, the collaboration—essential to the conduct of the war—of the great Belgian economic forces to the collaboration of political idealists who demanded the establishment of a social justice not easily reconciled with the rapacity of the financial and industrial trusts.

A choice had to be made: either a rapid transformation of the bases of the State, bringing about bouts of ill humor in moneyed circles; or the temporary status quo, social stagnation, in order to secure the support of those who held the banks, the factories, the machines, and regulated the work of millions of workers and employees.

The choice was made—as could be foreseen—in the conservative direction. For the business world, it was truly the golden age. Political power, put on standby, had in fact ceased to control anything; there was not the slightest risk of interpellations in Parliament about abuses! Strikes were forbidden! The unions no longer bothered anyone; the tax authorities themselves were constantly stopped by the magic words "war production." But day and night, trains of material left for the Reich's depots. What could the latter have complained about?

It must be added that this choice corresponded exactly to the personal tastes and caste prejudices of General von Falkenhausen. The milieu of the great lords of money was the milieu he liked; his friends in Germany belonged to the capitalist clan checked by Hitler; they dreamed bitterly of a reversal of the socialism established in their country since 1933. Falkenhausen was personally linked to several of the instigators of the July 20, 1944, plot against Hitler, whose goal was to give power to soldiers associated with the representatives of the old possessing classes.

From the first months of the occupation, Falkenhausen exploited to the full the instructions that banked on industrial overproduction. This policy of strict social conservatism, for the exclusive benefit of the capitalist world—the only one that counted in his eyes—formed part of his way of thinking, of conceiving social hierarchies.

The support he gave openly to the Flemings also came from the old conceptions of conservative and

imperial Germany.

When Falkenhausen favored the appointment, to a key post, of one of the V.N.V. candidates, he put all the more enthusiasm into it because the man came from his own social milieu. A Heymans, proposed by the Flemish nationalists as president of Winter Relief, was preferred to Rex's candidate—also an excellent Fleming—solely because he was a great businessman. An affable and sympathetic man, moreover, Heymans did all he could to conciliate our friendship.

General von Falkenhausen supported the people of the V.N.V. politically not because they were National Socialists, but only because he saw in them the direct heirs of the activists contemporary with Borms.

Their supremacy in the West was, he believed, a possibility of extending German radiance to the North Sea and the Channel, and of integrating our commercial and industrial potential into the complex of the Reich's economy. He measured with the eyes of a German of 1914, seeking extensions, outlets, markets: Antwerp, the first of the Germanic ports; Ghent, a formidable industrial bastion; Limburg and its brand-new coal basin would have marvelously prolonged the fabulous network built by the Westphalian-Rhenish magnates who had forged the framework of William II's regime, all impatient to put an end to the grandiose social reforms imposed by the Hitlerian regime.

Falkenhausen had, in short, but with more intelligence and flexibility, taken up the plan of his predecessor from the First World War, Governor-General von Bissing, a conservative plan inspired by economic materialism and bourgeois imperialism. The V.N.V. seemed to him a political instrument usable for that end.

In Wallonia, only the metallurgy of Liège and the coal mines of Hainaut had held his attention.

This strange, manic man, with a Voltairian mind, because of his political and social conceptions, lagged behind by at least thirty years. In short, nothing differentiated him from a Thyssen. When the Anglo-American bombers began to pound the factories of the great German consortiums, he found it clearly desirable that an end be put to hostilities. No doubt he thought, like so many others, whatever country they belonged to, that the true fatherland is capital.

Contrary to what one might have believed, General von Falkenhausen's power was not without limit. From Berlin itself, he was constantly countered by police organizations working in the shadows, whose omnipotence gradually made itself felt.

My relations with the occupation authorities remained distant, and Falkenhausen's antisocial policy scarcely encouraged me to improve them.

During the spring of 1941, I had limited myself to making a few visits to our sections, simply to maintain contact. Not seeing clearly enough into the future, I had reduced my political activity more and more. My wife begged me to abandon everything. Never had I felt so close to my own people, so happy among my children. I hardly ever left them, and it was only just that I went each day to spend half an hour at Rex headquarters or at the newspaper.

The more the Reich's victories grew in scale, in Yugoslavia, in Greece, the more I felt our debility. An enormous mass, the Reich of 1941, was deploying itself from the North Pole to the island of Crete; it stood at our flank, mysterious, fabulous, indecipherable. We received from it only a shadow that chilled

us. The vanity of our efforts filled me with a profound melancholy.

As if the betrayal by the forces of money and the break-up of the country into two zones of action were not enough, ever graver symptoms of disintegration appeared in the country and even within the Rexist movement. At first I thought these were ambitions exacerbated by my slowness or too tensely directed toward immediate accomplishments. I did not let myself be impressed. I wanted an overall solution, honest, honorable, binding Hitler and the Reich—or nothing.

But among us, as everywhere else, there were hotheads, careerists. Certain Rexists in the provinces entered into contact with second-rank Germans, holding obscure little talks with them without my consent, in the hope of obtaining local mandates. I was even summoned to commit myself to a policy of partial successes: “Only,” I was told, “the visible conquest of a few official posts will ensure Rex’s prestige in public opinion.”

I wanted no such prestige at any price. Thus I was led to decapitate Rex-Liège and expel its principal leader. Glued to the Gestapo of the boulevard de la Sauvenière, he already saw himself, thanks to it, installed as mayor of the Ardent City. Certain German services later fished this ambitious man back out and used him for vague tasks of censorship and police work.

I found my way rather poorly at that time through all the complications of the German hierarchy.

One of my lieutenants had bought a book as thick as a dictionary containing the table of Reich organizations. Hundreds of uniforms were represented in it. Twenty times I tried to understand something of this prodigious muddle. Twenty times I had to give up the struggle. After four years, I managed to distinguish thirty or forty great categories of rival “Dienststellen.” But in 1941 I was in the bush.

I was drowning in all these ranks, real or fictitious, these uniforms passing from goose-dropping brown to green-gray, to blue-gray, to blue-green, to black, to candy pink; these shoulder-straps narrow or broad, flat or braided, on one shoulder or on both shoulders; these piping colors of every sort, pale green, white, red, canary yellow. These innumerable “Dienststellen” themselves contained a prodigiously tangled skein of subdivisions and liaison offices.

For the press question alone, for example, there was in Brussels a service directed by Minister Achman, directly dependent on the presidency of the Military Administration; but there was also the Propaganda Abteilung; then the press offices of the Reich embassy; then the shadowy department of super-propaganda attached to the S.D. Ministry of Propaganda, War Ministry, Foreign Ministry, Himmler’s delegates all got in one another’s way, jealous of their prerogatives, infatuated with their rights.

The discussion of the least problem brought about the convocation of a veritable ecumenical council of representatives from each “Stelle” or each “Abteilung.” In the spring of 1941, I did not imagine that German offices could conduct their game without other German offices knowing it, or even in opposition to them.

At first I believed in the duplicity of the Military Administration. After some months, I was forced to admit that, despite the loyalty of a General Reeder, small police patrols, directed from Berlin, managed to insinuate themselves everywhere in Belgium, disposing of considerable funds for their underground work. They labored to set up, opposite the collaborationist groupings practically recognized, rival organizations fabricated from whole cloth, which they maneuvered as they pleased and which were

intended to serve as means of pressure. Recruited among unscrupulous ambitious men, embittered men, and bought men, their role was to outbid, to leap in one bound over the Rubicons before which the others hesitated. Such blackmail was practiced in all the occupied countries, and this is what made sincere collaboration so difficult.

The V.N.V. succumbed after three years of such provocations. Rex resisted them only because I had, in time, shifted the essential part of our effort toward the struggle on the Eastern Front. By dint of suffering and blood, we were able to clear the ground, force the Reich's respect, and obtain from Hitler the promise to bring our country back to life.

The police plotters of 1941 were going to persist especially against the finest of our organizations, that of the Rexist Youth. A student at the University of Brussels, John Hagemans, had put it back on its feet with an apostle's faith after the invasion of 1940.

Hagemans was at once an idealist, a leader of men, a poet passionate about the era of our Seventeen Provinces, and a painter as magnificent in his frescoes of thirty to forty square meters as in his small portraits and landscapes. His handwriting itself, with square descenders, a grave and proud resurrection of Gothic script, was an extraordinary pictorial and musical composition.

With makeshift means, he had reconstituted groups of young people, marvelous in dynamism, with brisk uniforms, with the tall drums of landsknechts, with rites inspired by the history of the Low Countries. The marches, the games, the meditations belonged mystically to the purest spirit of chivalry. The newcomers were armed knights, on bended knee, the flat of the sword on the shoulder. The oaths rang out, noble and fervent.

Along the roads, by the evening fires, resounded their choruses, always grandiose, epic, sometimes melancholy, recalling Burgundian supremacy.

The Youth thus formed by John Hagemans burned to purify the world, to rebuild a country with virtues as ardent as the fires that crossed, in the middle of the camps, the nocturnal majesty.

John Hagemans was a son of the Low Countries to his fingertips. He was a one-hundred-percent National Socialist. He deeply admired the Greater Reich. But he wanted to enter Germanic Europe with standards flying, Flemish and Walloon landsknechts proudly striking their tall drums marked with the double-headed Imperial Eagle. It was the Burgundian Circle advancing, as in the glorious and free time of Charles V and the Peace of Augsburg.

This state of mind was not to everyone's taste. To check us, certain emissaries from Berlin undertook, by means of subsidies, to set against us an organization baptized Roman Youth, entirely artificial. Despite considerable publicity and the advantages it granted, it gathered very few members.

It was enough for them to make an outing of a day or two for Le Soir at once to devote an enthusiastic report to them. Le Soir had become the instrument of intrigues whose purpose was to undermine the unity of the nationalist forces of Belgium won over to the New Order.

One day, I was informed that the best thing would be to come to terms with this Roman Youth. But the merger proposed to us aimed purely and simply at infiltrating our Youth, which would thus have been stuffed with Gestapo agents. I refused bluntly. The Eastern war soon came. The Rexist Youth morally formed by John Hagemans showed such high virtues there that there was no longer any question of

contesting its rights. But to secure those rights, John Hagemans had had to die in combat, a sublime paladin.

This attempt at sabotage was to be followed by an offensive of greater scope. Rex itself was now going to be attacked, even though, officially, Rex was the only approved party in Wallonia. From one day to the next, we saw a mushroom spring up called Agra (the Friends of the Greater German Reich). This movement openly advocated the attachment of Wallonia to the Reich.

We were neither Alsatians nor Sudeten Germans, but an old people, quite original. That one should propose that we enter into a federation of peoples where our personality would be recognized—our personality and our rights—that was perfect. But to offer us annexation was stupidity or provocation.

We had scarcely decided the V.N.V. to cease its intrigues in Wallonia when this Agra began sending its grenades between our legs. It disposed of unlimited funds.

At exactly that time, Germany was sweeping through Belgrade, Sarajevo, Salonika, Athens. Its panzers were parading before the Acropolis. Goering's paratroopers were clearing the olive groves of old Crete, mother of Mediterranean civilization. The Stukas pursued as far as the Bay of Alexandria the English ships fleeing from Chania. In Libya, the English were running away before the Afrika Korps, abandoning their equipment and surrendering by the thousands.

In the spring of 1941, the most optimistic of the Anglophile chroniclers of Brussels, the future minister Struye, wrote bitterly: "The gigantic effort of the British in North Africa has been reduced to nothing in a few days by the intervention of an enemy powerfully equipped and whose military force has never been so evident, since nothing resists it and everything bends before its will.

"For how long will the English still possess mastery of the Mediterranean, which the Germans were able to cross without opposition in order to organize this North African campaign that will perhaps bring them within a few weeks to the banks of the Suez Canal, cutting England off from every direct relation with its Asian positions?

"And nothing indicates that the course of things is going to change, Germany's reserves of men appearing inexhaustible and its chances of success greater and greater, alas!"

Was England still going to persist in a fight in which she was regularly beaten? Could one reasonably think that, in order to obtain, after years of exhausting struggle, a sterile victory, the United Kingdom would go so far as to provoke by itself the dislocation of its empire? Hitler had clearly proclaimed, after the battles of Poland and France, that the Reich had no interest in destroying the British Empire.

The English are stubborn, but they are realistic. A compromise peace, inspired by common sense, seemed a possible solution. It was known that feelers toward peace were being made from various sides. Hitler had not been intoxicated by his successes. The conditions he offered were very moderate.

If, at the beginning of 1941, a small minority of Europeans still clung to the hope of a complete British recovery, almost unimaginable then, most believed in a total victory of the Reich's armies, or at the very least in a compromise peace.

Such peaces are generally made on the backs of the weak. Politically, Belgium was growing weaker and weaker.

There was no longer any counting on any reaction from public opinion. It had become perfectly amorphous. Whatever happened, it scarcely mattered now to the Belgian, provided he was left in peace, provided he earned money, provided the “smokkelage” (the famous black market) ensured meat, bacon, butter, beans, white “pistolets,” and oranges... The Brussels prospectors raided everything, as far as the Pyrenees. They paid cash on the nail, carried their goods quite tranquilly in military trucks that they rented for ten thousand francs per weekend. The French, amazed and terrified, could only cry out, throwing their arms to heaven: “They are taking everything from us!” speaking not of the Germans, but of our astute compatriots.

The haute bourgeoisie, by its integration into war production, had in fact rallied to the idea of the Reich’s continental supremacy. It considered it an indisputable, ineluctable, even profitable thing.

The extreme left, with very rare exceptions, was as resigned to German tutelage as the big bourgeois. The socialist agitator Brunfaut peacefully sipped his filtered coffee on the terraces of the place de Brouckère while smoothing his salt-and-pepper beard.

The communist leaders, haughtily rebuffed by Falkenhausen, stagnated in complete inaction. They did not publish the smallest “contrary” tract, as they say in Brussels. For them, Hitler was a friend, since he was Stalin’s friend. “Resistance” then appeared to them as a maneuver of lubricious vipers. Only the interest of Soviet Russia guided them. Normally they should have opposed the occupation authorities in 1941, associated as these were so intimately with the magnates of the Belgian trusts. But they were very careful not to provoke the slightest attack, the least disturbance, not even a one-hour stoppage of work. Stalin’s orders, the interest of the Soviets, prevailed over every consideration of patriotism or class.

The Belgian working mass, also attracted by the German mirage and by high wages, increasingly took the road to the Rhine; Flemish and Walloon workers scattered through the factories of the Reich were inexhaustible in praise of Hitler’s social achievements. Departures, in absolute freedom, were more and more numerous. They would increase at such a rate that one would arrive at the fabulous total of four hundred three thousand five hundred forty-eight commitments of Belgian workers for voluntary labor in Germany, for the Atlantic Wall, or for the construction of Luftwaffe airfields.

Only an act absolutely out of the ordinary could still tear our country from the glue into which it was sinking.

I knew the Germans’ respect for the soldier. There was, in my eyes, one last chance to run.

Two months before the launching of the Russian campaign, I wrote to the Führer, placing myself at his disposal as a volunteer in any arm. Thus perhaps, by distinguishing myself on the battlefields, I could attract his attention and finally make known to him the misfortunes of my fatherland...

I received a long letter from Marshal Keitel replying to me in the name of the Führer, a very amiable letter whose contents left me dumbfounded. It proved to me that Hitler knew nothing of our tragedy: “The Führer,” Keitel wrote, “cannot let you leave for the front, because you are indispensable for your political activity.”

What could they possibly have told him in the reports from Brussels? So he believed me to be in full action!

The misunderstanding was complete.

XXX

THE CRUSADE ON THE EASTERN FRONT

Creation of the European legions. - The Brabançonne, August 8, 1941. - Napoleon's veterans and legionaries. - Fervor of donations. - My enlistment as a simple soldier. - Every chance had to be attempted. - Force open the roads, so that the Fatherland might pass!

Betrayed by her politicians and her men of money, stabbed by linguistic rivalries, Belgium was no more, in June 1941, than a res derelicta.

By herself, she would no longer rise again. Only an immense event, reworking the whole of Europe, could still give her one last chance; but for that, an absolutely new fact was needed.

On June 22, 1941, at dawn, in a flash, the new fact appeared. A gigantic war was unleashed, calling into question the millennial values of twenty peoples, summoning those twenty peoples to a titanic struggle in which the virtues, forces, and possibilities of each European community would be definitively gauged. In that instant, a people until then prostrate, we became again a people called—if it interpreted the language of destiny with boldness—to reconquer prestige and rights completely.

Convinced as we were of the state of extreme distress of our country, how could we have hesitated?

Everything cried out to us to act: our Christian faith, our concern for the civilization of Europe, our love for our collapsed fatherland, which only an exceptional move to the front could still—in the event of Germany's victory—save from annihilation or dismemberment!

What objection—formalism of laws? belated sentimentalism?—could have been stronger than this anguished call of our patriotism?

Serve the Reich? It was not a question of the Reich, but of Belgium. We were the volunteers of our fatherland and of Europe, nothing else. No one ever asked us to swear fidelity to the Wehrmacht, or to the Reich, or to the head of the Reich. The legions were a European organization and a non-German organization. Hitler had authority over them only as a European and not as a German. The oath sworn by the legionaries deliberately excluded—by Hitler's express will—any allusion to the head of Germany or to Germany's army.

To condemn, as was done after 1945, thousands of our legionaries for having “served the Reich” is a juridical monstrosity. The only country our legionaries served on the Eastern Front was their country, their prostrate country of 1941, for which they wished to win, at the price of their hardship and their blood, indisputable titles to resurrection. And, beyond their beloved fatherland, it was no more a question of the Reich, but of Europe—all Europe!—of its faith, of its culture, eternal values, then mortally threatened.

Uniforms of the Reich? There too: complete bad faith! The legions of the East needed a single uniform. The uniform of the most numerous army—because materially there was no other possibility and because, juridically, international conventions allowed us no other solution—became the European

uniform of all the volunteers of the East, each of them, to show that he remained the loving son of his people, proudly affixing to his sleeve the colors of his fatherland. Did the Belgians of London act differently? Moreover, they went much further than we did, pronouncing, for their part, an oath of allegiance to England that we would never have agreed to swear to the Third Reich.

There is not a precaution we did not take in 1941 to protect jealously the national character of our participation in the crusade of Europe: a military oath of exclusively anti-Bolshevik scope, in which every bond of subjection to another country was formally excluded; national shield on the uniform common to all Europeans; strictly Belgian cadres; national language; national flag, the oldest in our history, tied with the black, yellow, and red colors of contemporary Belgium.

To avoid any confusion, I even refrained from any farewell visit to General von Falkenhausen. Not only was my discretion understood, but a detachment of honor, with music, was sent by the Militarverwaltung to solemnize our departure. I was asked what hymn I wished to have played when the trains started. I answered instantly: La Brabançonne.

There had been neither a signed peace nor even an armistice (despite Pierlot and Spaak) between Belgium and the Reich: under these conditions it could appear rather stiff to have our national anthem played by the Wehrmacht itself. But the German Command accepted my choice without discussion.

Thanks to the Wallonia Legion, Brussels heard, on August 8, 1941, after fifteen months of silence, a dazzling Brabançonne resound in the Gare du Nord, played with full reinforcement of flat drums, fifes, and jingling bells, by musicians with swallow-nest shoulder ornaments, steel helmets, and feldgrau uniforms!

In Belgium as elsewhere, the crusade against the Soviets was extremely popular in 1941. The great crowds, haunted for years by the communist peril, were moved on seeing thousands of young men from all countries leave for the distant steppes where the salvation of Europe would be decided. From 1944 onward, the communists succeeded everywhere in terrorizing public opinion. Those who acclaimed us in August 1941 howl today with the wolves.

The rich, above all, the most enthusiastic at that time, those who pushed us most to go and get our faces smashed in (to defend their bank accounts), were the quickest to disown us. The bourgeois is the vilest of animals that crawl. He licks the hand that strikes him. He flattens himself before the one who kicks him.

Nothing was more ignoble than the spectacle of the postwar period in Belgium, where a bourgeois magistracy, seized by fear, set itself fiercely to condemning to death or to hard labor for life magnificent heroes, returned by a miracle from the most frightful of wars, marked most often by the scars of numerous wounds.

At least the idealism and sufferings of the survivors should have been respected, apart from any question of political tendencies.1 They were sincere, disinterested. They risked their lives a hundred times for the ideas in which they believed.

In any case, by their extraordinary valor in combat, they did honor to our people. As early as March 1943, thanks to them, Hitler rallied completely to our project of Burgundian reconstruction in the West. Even if they had been wrong, and they were not wrong, they acted in good faith.

Our whole history is filled with very noble divergences in the conception of patriotic duty: Belgians serving our princes of Spain or fighting against those who seemed to them already then to be "occupiers"; Belgians serving our princes of the House of Austria or Belgians serving their rival, the French Empire, which occupied our provinces for a long time; Belgians fighting against Napoleon at Waterloo, Belgians fighting for Napoleon in the same battle, calling to one another from atop their horses; Belgians serving Orange or fighting Orange at the barricades of 1830!

Once the conflicts were over, had the defeated, in former times, been mocked, persecuted, imprisoned, condemned to death? Can one imagine, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a Clerfayt, a Beaulieu, a Chasteler, thrown into the penal colony by Napoleon, or a Lahure, a Boussart, a Dumonceau, an Évers, a Duvivier sent to the mines by Metternich?

Never did any incident, even of a local order, set the Belgian veterans of the Napoleonic armies and of the anti-Napoleonic armies against one another when, the wars over, they resumed their place in our towns and villages. They were equally respected and they respected one another.

The Belgian bourgeois of 1945, sweating with fear, put their fright before the respect due to heroes. They felt, stuck to their necks, the cold steel of communist blackmail. And to appease the Moscow-men, they let those same anti-Bolshevik volunteers be hunted down, imprisoned, and killed, those whom they had watched with moved eyes at the beginning of August 1941, murmuring: "Those men at least risk their skin for their ideal; they are pure."

Before our departure, I held a few meetings in the country. Nowhere did the slightest incident occur. An exact barometer of the atmosphere: in my enormous mail I did not receive a single anonymous letter in which I was insulted. God knows, however, how fond the public is of these valiant exercises. King Leopold had not hidden from his circle the interest he felt in the gesture of our volunteers. Better than anyone, he understood its significance for the future: the defeated and the victors of 1940 were becoming equals again within the same European army. Only courage could henceforth distinguish them. And all recoveries became conceivable.

The thought of Leopold III, fleshly representative of the national idea, never left us. There is not a day when, morally, he was not present among us. It was with the cry of "Long live the King!" that we left Belgium. It was with the cry of "Long live the King!" that the Wallonia Legion reached the Dnieper, on the night of November 2, 1941. Never was an army set ablaze by a purer and more exalting patriotism.

All social classes, all tendencies, were represented in the endless lines of men of every age who pressed toward our recruiting offices at the end of July and the beginning of August 1941: many Rexists, but also many non-Rexists; young Catholics logical with their principles; veterans, covered with decorations won against Germany, but who put the salvation of Europe above resentments from the past; workers in very great numbers; industrialists too, who abandoned the most brilliant positions. Often the father, the son, or the sons enlisted: three, four sons sometimes. There was something still more extraordinary: the simultaneous enlistment at Charleroi of the grandfather, the father, and the son. The legion had a volunteer seventy-one years old, an old papa always cheerful, working in the mess from morning to night, but unable, when he came out of a bush, to fasten his suspenders behind his back!

On the other hand, three legionaries were only fifteen years old and had falsified their identity cards to deceive the examiners. One of them, locked for several days by his parents in his bedroom on the second floor and deprived of his clothes, climbed down the walls at night by using bed sheets, ran in

his shirt to a young comrade's home, borrowed a pair of trousers from him, and managed to slip into the train without being spotted by anyone. Before such stubbornness, the parents forgave him: at eighteen, this heroic boy had won the epaulettes of second lieutenant and the Iron Cross First Class.

The enthusiasm was such that the calmest natures let themselves be carried along. For six months I had, as a comrade in my combat group, a worker from the Brussels telephone service. He had never attended a political meeting and had spent ten years of his life, hooks on his feet, checking the cups and contacts at the tops of poles. He loved his wife, his home, lived a quiet little life: pipe, slippers, gueuze-lambic. He read one of my appeals in a newspaper. The next day he left a note on the family table to tell his wife that he was leaving for Russia. He returned from the front a year later, a great mutilated man, having lost the use of both legs, pathetic on his crutches, having devoted to me forever an attachment such as only the people is capable of.

But in the same hand-to-hand fight of February 1942 in which this telephone man had been so terribly hit, a t'Serclaes, descendant of the great Tilly de t'Serclaes, had fallen, a simple soldier; a de Meester de Heyndonck had fallen, a simple soldier: Belgians of all classes, merged in the same love of their country, in the same desire to elevate their lives...

More than thirteen hundred Walloon volunteers had enlisted in the first contingent. There were six thousand in all, from 1941 to 1945. Flanders' participation was appreciably equal.

I had signed up exactly like all the others, had passed the medical examination, signed my form, received my card.

Yet many believed that this was merely a propaganda gesture, nothing more. That was to know me badly.

I have always had the taste, the need, for giving. If I had had a religious vocation, I would have gone into the bush of the Congo or to the islands of Oceania. Rex was always for me the occasion for a great surge of the soul. When I entered the political mêlée, it was the desire to purify, to ennoble national life, that drove me to action.

I had kept the nostalgia for spiritual revolutions. At bottom, that alone in man interests me: his heart, his heart to be washed, his heart to be guided, to be raised, his heart to be loved.

The year 1940-1941 had been for me a tragic disappointment. I have never been able to get used to duplicity. If it is not to build something beautiful, great, clean, what is the point of exhausting oneself in political battles?

Ambition, yes, I have ambition. But I can also be happy in the most extreme material abasement, looking at a clear sky, caressing a purple rose, listening to a nightingale's song in the light, warm shadows of June evenings.

In any case, nothing—apart from the great luminous songs that dwell within me—is a law to me. I did not love politics for politics' sake, but so that it might become the pretext for a poem in which a people would have risen above the ugly and the mediocre.

Since the beginning of 1941, I knew that as long as the war lasted, politics could lead to nothing great.

By enlisting, I cut short all mediocre temptations. I was determined to return to politics only if I had acquired, in the meantime, the right to speak as a master.

I did not try to evade the issue. My renunciation was total. The public was not immediately convinced of it, and quite a few people for a rather long time gave credence to a fable spread by the Anglophiles, according to which I had got off the train at the first stop, at Schaerbeek station. Others claimed to have seen me at Bouillon, having confused me with my unfortunate brother Édouard (assassinated in 1944 by the terrorists).

It obviously seemed incredible to our stay-at-homes that, living in a happy home, young father of a large family, I should renounce everything in order to plunge as a simple soldier into this Russian adventure!

For me, the question did not arise; one does not enlist comrades to go before death without running that risk oneself. One does not propose suffering to others without suffering with them. My comrades saw me at their side for forty-five months: I did not miss a single one of their battles, always in the front rank. I lived exactly their life, a life of glory sometimes, a life of misery often, obscure, harassing, in which the soul suffocates; five times I was wounded at their side! Misery, joys, sorrows, hopes, we shared everything, the same joys, the same duties, the same trials.

It was to give my companions this comfort that I left as a simple soldier, and that I remained so long in the ranks, toiling like everyone else, mingled with the humblest among them in the thin straw of billets or in the mad snow that howled.

For nothing in the world would I have accepted that the smallest difference be made between them and me. All my old comrades know it: I was their brother-in-arms, their brother, simply. We were alike. We loved one another. Which one of us has had his heart changed despite our misfortunes?

This life among the troops was a difficult undertaking. For many, I had for years been a leader haloed by popularity and success. They were going to see, day and night, down to the smallest details of my life, to know each of my faults, each of my weaknesses. Familiarity, ridicule, clumsiness, weariness lay in wait for me. Military cohabitation, especially at the front, is the total laying bare of body and soul. There, there is only one means of imposing oneself: to be a good comrade, to be always helpful, simple, cheerful, to be the first at every fatigue duty, to be the bravest at the hour when each man is gambling with his life.

I was appointed non-commissioned officer, then officer, only by the accidents of battle. It was not my wish. I would have wanted always to remain a simple soldier. Even when I had become division commander, I took care always to keep the soul of the soldier, clothed in the same coarse cloth as my men, wearing the same boots as they did, eating exactly the same chow, sleeping on the ground or on a bad floor of an izba, by chance, like all of them. At the hour when it was necessary to spring at the enemy, I handed the direction of the staff to a technician so that I could leap first into the assault at the head of my boys.

I did not do it out of bravado. I did it because I did not have the right to ask my companions for more than I gave myself. Who would have complained of nights at the door or inside the frozen izbas when he saw me curled up in a poor blanket, two steps from him? Who would have trembled before danger when he saw me running, a machine gun in my fists, twenty meters ahead of everyone?

The gift of others can be born only from the gift of oneself; otherwise, it is only a flash in the pan. And our fire burned for four years, always more intense, always higher.

In the second place, I was determined to practice this total austerity of the soldier's life because I wanted to impose myself on the Germans by my courage, by my exploits, and to owe nothing to favoritism.

To accept a rank without having deserved it was to put oneself in a state of inferiority vis-à-vis the Germans. It was to owe them something. Moreover, it was to turn oneself into a false officer, incompetent, incapable of carrying out his task properly.

Everywhere else, the political leaders had the weakness to accept these spectacular promotions.

In the Flanders Legion, three V.N.V. leaders were promoted officers on the day of departure.

In France, Doriot put on, from the first minute, a lieutenant's jacket. I was kindly offered the same favors. I refused with all my strength. What I wanted was the Iron Cross obtained at the peril of my life. Ranks, decorations could have value in my eyes only if I had won them under fire.

Upon the Germans, a people of warriors, my attitude was the only one that could make an impression. At first it amazed, stupefied quite a few Wehrmacht officers to whom I was pointed out in the front line, loaded with all my simple soldier's kit, my heavy machine gun on my shoulder. But with time and with combat it earned me such authority and such renown that if Hitler had won, they would have allowed me to obtain everything for Belgium.

There had been enough to discourage us during the year of setbacks, tergiversations, and even humiliations that we had known from August 1940 to August 1941.

But, in the state of tragic abandonment in which my country found itself, I had the duty, in conscience, to attempt still this ultimate personal effort, the effort of blood.

Germany could have won the war. In that case, what would have happened if we, the fighters of the East—scourged after defeat by the horrible name of traitors—had not acquired, through suffering, the right to speak in the name of our people as comrades-in-arms respected by the victor?

Everything else collapsed: Leopold III knew deportation; the V.N.V. was annihilated after innumerable ambushes. We alone, the soldiers, imposed ourselves. In 1942, the prestige of our legion was already very great. After our fabulous breakout from the encirclement of Cherkassy in 1944, everything was saved. I say this because I am certain of it, having then seen the Führer at length, on several occasions, and because, as early as the spring of 1943, after our epic of the Caucasus, Himmler had given me, on the Führer's behalf, the most formal assurances that my political plan was accepted in its full scope. If Hitler had prevailed, we would have drawn our fatherland out of the abyss. We would have hoisted it toward grandiose destinies: our glory had, in advance, paid for and obtained its resurrection and its greatness.

Hitler lost: therefore, for the opportunistic or cowardly spectator, we were wrong.

No, we were not wrong. Every chance had to be attempted. If Stalin and Churchill had been defeated, did our country have to die? At that hour, thanks to our dead, we could have given it life again. And the

crowds would have acclaimed us and blessed us for having saved them.

Besides, who would dare say that tomorrow it will not be necessary to begin again the work of saving Europe, that work which, unrecognized and too clear-sighted pioneers, we undertook prematurely, with hearts consumed too quickly?

But what do the blindness, cowardice, and injustice of human packs matter, dependent on passions, slaves of material successes!

It is in the peace and fire of our souls that our reward resides. We were frank and honest. We did everything for our people. Could one risk more for it? Could one suffer more for it?

We all knew very well, on August 8, 1941, that we were facing terrible tragedies.

During the last two days I spent at my home, I was no longer able to say a word, so much did emotion tighten my throat. I watched my sweet little girls, my little boy of two, frolicking in the warm grass and pale cornflowers. Grief was breaking my soul. To leave this home, so gentle, where everything was tenderness, softness, beauty, poetry... To leave over there, into solitude and the unknown, thousands of kilometers away, to leave everything, to lose everything, to begin a life again...

I took refuge in my library to weep all alone, my head folded on my arm, like a child. Ah! you who have sullied us and hated us so much, you do not know what tearings we knew for having loved our people with a desperate love, while so many others sheltered themselves and kept silent!

August 8, 1941, was for each of us a day of unspeakable sorrow. But with heads high, amid the cheers of a moved crowd that then understood, because its heart had not yet been soiled, casting a last look at our families, at our old familiar streets, at the statue of Godfrey of Bouillon, the precursor, we departed, the first contingent of the great cohort of seekers of glory and greatness, who, escaping the torpor of an amorphous present, stubborn, repressing despair, wanted at all costs to open to their country the roads of the future!